

TNCC 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

NORWAY | ASIA BUSINESS REVIEW

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SPECIAL REVIEW

Thai-Norwegian Chamber of
Commerce Celebrates



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Cover Story

The cover image depicts one of the many great fireworks displays on Bangkok's Chao Phraya River. This issue is wholly dedicated to success stories of the Norwegian-related business sector in Thailand through its 25 years history.

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BUSINESS REVIEW**

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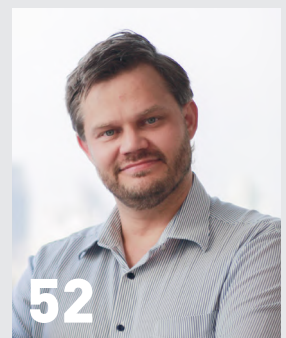
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The Thai-Norwegian was formed in 1996 to mainly support Norwegian business interests in Thailand and to create venues for networking and exchange of ideas. We have collected pictures from the last 17 years of the chamber's existence. Pages 32-33.





TAKING A POSITION IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION

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A Silver Celebration



PHOTO: NORWAY CONNECT

Looking back over the last 25 years, you might not think that there has been a lot of change in Norwegian related business in Thailand, but let me help you set the record straight.

Allow me to describe where we were 25 years ago in relation to Norwegian business in Thailand: Telenor had not yet entered Thailand. Aibel had not started their production of equipment for the North Sea in Thailand. Norwegian salmon was a rarity on Thai supermarket shelves if at all available and terribly expensive.

25 years ago, the big Norwegian companies in Thailand were Jotun, which had already celebrated its 25th anniversary; Norconsult, which was engaged in designing the many bridges across Bangkok's Chao Phraya River, in addition to their involvement in the telecom sector and of course Yara that had already been supplying Norwegian fertilisers since 1907

Norwegian tourists visiting Thailand were few, 30,000 in 1996 against 130,000 in 2019, the last "normal" year before the pandemic. In the other direction, there were 53,000 room nights recorded from Thailand at hotels in Norway in 2019, a record year. In 1996, there were no direct flights between Norway and Thailand; Thai Airways International started their flights in 2009 followed by Norwegian in 2013.

I bring you these snapshots to give you a clear picture of how far we have come in the last 25 years.

During the same period, the Thai-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce has been a constant presence; connecting people, helping new businesses get started, helping newcomers understand how to succeed in Thailand and helping to lobby the Thai government in terms of opening the Thai market to foreign investments.

On behalf of the present Norwegian-related businesses in Thailand, I'd like to thank all those that went before us, my predecessors as chamber presidents and everyone else who believed in Thailand and what the country had to offer. These were people who built a foundation giving Norwegian businesses here a solid platform to expand from.

In 2046, when we look back 25 years, my hope is that we can be equally proud of our achievements and the way we have supported businesses in both Norway and Thailand with high quality products and standards that can stand the test of time.

Thank you everyone who has contributed to the chamber during the last quarter of a century.

Sincerely,

*Axel Blom
President, Thai-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce*



PHOTO: ROYAL NORWEGIAN EMBASSY/THOMAS ENGSTRÖM

The history of investment and trade between Norway and Thailand is intrinsically linked to the two countries' close friendship.

The Long Journey of Friendship

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

The visit of H.M. King Rama V to the newly independent Norway in 1907, signalled the beginning of a close relationship between the two Kingdoms that has evolved into a partnership on many fronts.

From the visit of H.M. King Rama V in 1907 to the entrance of large firms like Telenor and Aibel into the Kingdom and the growth of tourism on both sides prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the journey together has produced beneficial results for all parties.

Having read about the 1907 journey of H.M. King Rama V in Norway and now seeing its legacy in person, Norwegian Ambassador to Thailand and Cambodia, H.E. Ms. Kjersti Rødsmoen, understands the significance of the visit.

"It is astonishing to see just how much one person can do and it is an honour for Norway to have played a role in supporting these accomplishments," Ambassador Rødsmoen says. "As Ambassador and being in Thailand, you see just how significant and influential H.M. King Rama V was and how much his visit to Norway meant to both our countries."

An example of that is the decision of H.M. King Rama V to send Yara fertiliser, which was known as Norsk Hydro at the time, back to Thailand. Ambassador Rødsmoen believes this

not only benefited the Thai agricultural sector but helped lay the groundwork for the Norwegian company's eventual global expansion.

The commercial element is just one aspect of the close friendship. Another is the bond that has developed between the Royal Families over the years. H.R.H. Crown Prince Haakon Magnus attended the Royal Cremation Ceremony of H.M. King Rama IX. Meanwhile, Thanpuying Sirikitiya Jensen, the great, great granddaughter of H.M. King Rama V, followed in his footsteps during a recent visit to Norway.

The path between the two countries was becoming increasingly traversed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. And while the desire of those in Norway wanting to visit Thailand's tropical hangouts is hardly breaking news, the inclination of Thais to head in the opposite direction during the autumn and winter months may come as a bit of a surprise.

The number of Thai people wanting to travel to Norway was at an all-time high before the pandemic. It is

seen as a modern place for Thais to visit," Ambassador Rødsmoen states. "They want to travel during the fall and winter which is usually the slow time for tourism in Norway. But for them, this is the most exciting time to visit, and it reminds us Norwegians to appreciate this time of year in spite of its darkness and cold crisp weather."

The economic impact of tourism halting has been felt on both sides but there are some signs of life. The Ambassador noted the Embassy is seeing an increase in visa applications from Thais wanting to visit Norway while Norwegians have begun returning to Thailand since quarantine-free travel was introduced.

A Good Fit

Norwegian businesses and their Thai counterparts have unique ways of operating. Yet, it doesn't negatively affect the relationship. If anything, each side has an appreciation for what the other brings to the table.

"We see a good fit between the two cultures. I think the Thai business community appreciates the reliability and straightforward approach of Norwegian firms," Ambassador Rødsmoen points out. "We have influential products and well-known companies who have been operating in Thailand for quite some time. Each company has its own story here and many of them have a long story. This stability helps set us apart."

She adds Thailand is well organised and there is a structure in place that makes Norwegian businesses feel comfortable. Even during COVID-19, trade and investment between the pair has remained steady with some areas, such as salmon exports, witnessing unprecedented growth.

The good fit between the two countries will be important as Thailand looks to fight climate change. As green industries leaders, Norway can be a trusted partner in these transition efforts.

"We are very strong in oil and gas, the blue economy and shipping among other sectors. A lot of the things we are doing, we can do together with Thailand," Ambassador Rødsmoen says. "We are seeing the business community in Thailand also pushing the government in a positive way. They see a need to move forward."

At the COP26 Climate Change Conference, Thailand Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha promised to increase electric vehicle adoption, plant more trees and introduce other measures to meet carbon neutrality and net zero greenhouse gas emissions targets.

"We are very happy with the signals we have received from the Thai government when it comes to sustainability. They see the need to be a part of this change and we stand ready to cooperate in these efforts," Ambassador Rødsmoen reports. "There are areas, such as renewable energy and electric vehicles, where we have a great deal of knowledge to offer. Our goal in Norway is that all new private vehicles be electric by 2025. And if we Norwegians are able to establish manage charging stations in remote mountain crossings during our dark winters, anyone should be able to do it."

An understanding between the two governments along with strong private sector relationships has created optimism that an even more ambitious sustainability initiatives, like a carbon capture and storage system, could be rolled out.

"Hopefully, Thai industries see what can be done and join in, whether it comes to green technologies or something more complex like a carbon

capture and storage system," Ambassador Rødsmoen details. "We have made a lot of progress and gained a lot of knowledge which we are happy to share. This can cover sustainability initiatives across other sectors, including cement, waste management and recycling, as well."

According to the Ambassador, the good fit between Norway and Thailand can ensure work on sustainability efforts begins quickly once an agreement is reached. And while there may be some concerns regarding the initial costs, she urges Thai industries to factor in the trust they have with Norwegian firms and the reliability they provide before making any decisions.

Next Steps

When it comes to investment and trade, the journey Norway and Thailand has taken to become partners should now move to the next level in the form of an EFTA free-trade agreement.

"Trade between our countries has been steadily increasing over the years, but a free-trade agreement is an important part of moving this forward and creating stronger bonds. It is a signal that shows a willingness to invest," Ambassador Rødsmoen states. "There is hope we can move ahead on this as it is a building block of a commercial relationship."

From Norway, the biggest export items are seafood and fertilisers. Norwegian salmon has become one of the most popular items on the menu for many restaurants, while Yara fertilisers helps support Thailand's fruit and vegetable exports to new heights.

Another area of focus is liquefied natural gas (LNG). With Norway having developed several innovations in the LNG space and Thailand now looking to transition to cleaner forms of energy, the fit here is easy to see. LNG, though still a fossil fuel, is considered a relatively clean fuel, and a good alternative to more

polluting fossil fuels during the transition phase up to the time when renewable sources can become both reliable and competitive. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has made it difficult to get this on the agenda.

"LNG is something we want to put on the agenda as this is an area where we have a great deal of expertise in. We had several events planned in both Thailand and elsewhere in ASEAN but we have had to postpone them all," Ambassador Rødsmoen says. "We are going to try again in 2022 as we know there is interest, especially as Thailand looks towards an energy transition."

Of course, there is much more to friendship between the two countries than business. People have a vital role to play as well. There have even been times when the areas of business and people intersect. An example of this is Norwegian companies who carry over their diversity and inclusion programmes to Thailand, helping raise awareness and set standards in the process.

"Diversity and inclusivity are a priority for all Nordic companies, and we continue to work towards promoting this. I think a lot of positive things are taking place in this area, but more work is needed," Ambassador Rødsmoen notes. "It is nice to see Norwegian, and all Nordic companies, lead the way with their policies."

The next steps for Ambassador Rødsmoen will be concluding a term which began in August 2018. Her time as Ambassador to Thailand and Cambodia will obviously be tied to the COVID-19 pandemic which presented unforeseen challenges and opportunities.

"A lot of interesting things have come from the pandemic. For example, we have learned a lot about how to operate in a crisis. It has given us the chance to be creative," Ambassador Rødsmoen points out. "On the other hand, we are also missing out on many things. There are the travellers, exchanges and political visits that make things lively. We have kept this up digitally, but we look very much forwards to welcoming everyone back in person." ■



PHOTO: NORSK HYDRO

Above left: Norway's Ambassador to Thailand, Ms Kjersti Rødsmoen.
Above: H.M. King Rama V's visit to Norway in 1907 marked the beginning of a long journey of friendship between the two kingdoms. The King visited Norsk Hydro to study the production of nitrogen fertilisers

Facts

- Yara fertiliser was sent from Norway to Thailand by H.M. King Rama V in 1907
- The number of Thais travelling to Norway before the pandemic was at an all-time high
- Norwegian businesses are ready to assist Thailand as it looks to meet sustainability goals
- Norway's biggest export items are seafood, particularly salmon and fertilisers
- Norway-backed LNG events are scheduled for Thailand in 2022 after being delayed by COVID-19



There is optimism Thailand and the EFTA countries will resume negotiations on a free trade agreement shortly.

Talking Free Trade

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Talks have been on ice since 2006, but recent constructive dialogues mean a return to the table is possible in the coming months.

When the second round of free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations between Thailand and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states were concluded in January 2006, a third session was scheduled for April that year. Political instability in Thailand meant those talks were shelved with little traction being made until recently.

In 2020, the Department of Trade Negotiations hired a firm to study the benefits and impacts of a free trade agreement between Thailand and the EFTA countries. This was a move welcomed by the bloc which already has agreements in force with Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore.

The study, which was carried out by the Institute of Future Studies for Development, uncovered a number of key benefits. For example, an FTA would grow Thailand's GDP by 0.179 percent. Under an agreement, Thai exports to the EFTA countries would increase by 38 percent while imports from the EFTA countries would rise by 14.8 percent.

However, implementing an agreement would also come with impediments.

"The study has also identified the challenges of an FTA regarding the high expectations on standards and trade regulations, which may result in an obstacle to trade," Khun Auramon Supthaweethum, Director-General of the Department of Trade Negotiations, pointed out.

"An FTA may require an upgrade of certain standards, rules and regulations in which Thai stakeholders may need some time to adjust and develop capacity as well as to utilise its benefits," DG Khun Auramon stated. "Therefore, Thai entrepreneurs must prepare to develop and upgrade the standard of production to meet international standards, in which an appropriate adjustment period should be provided."

She continued, "At present, Thailand is discussing with the EFTA countries on the expectations of the issues to be discussed in the potential FTA and both sides' readiness to launch

an FTA."

This early discourse has been positive and there is a belief that negotiations could be initiated sometime in the next few months.

"The discussions are constructive, and the parties are working together to agree on the remaining outstanding issues required before the negotiations can be resumed, including on the scope of and guiding principles for the negotiations," Norwegian Ambassador to Thailand and Cambodia, H.E. Ms. Kjersti Rødsmoen, explained. "We are hopeful that the negotiations can be launched in early 2022."

According to Ambassador Rødsmoen, negotiations will aim to cover areas such as trade in goods and services; investment; intellectual property rights; competition; government procurement; and trade and sustainable development as well as legal and horizontal issues.

"An FTA will remove barriers to trade between the EFTA countries and Thailand, strengthen the economic cooperation, improve the market conditions for businesses and establish a predictable framework to facilitate more trade between our respective countries. Our aim is to conclude a comprehensive and mutually beneficial agreement," Ambassador Rødsmoen noted.

In addition to being mutually beneficial from a trade and economic standpoint, it is also desirable that an FTA will have a positive impact on the environment. DG Khun Auramon



PHOTO: SWISS-THAI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

believes it is an excellent opportunity to strengthen cooperation on the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) economic model by transferring knowledge and expertise about green businesses as well as sharing innovation and advanced technology between entrepreneurs.

"While aiming to promote bilateral trade between the EFTA countries and Thailand, the EFTA countries want to make sure that such increased trade does not come at the expense of people and the environment," Ambassador Rødsmoen detailed. "Ambitious provisions on trade and sustainable development should therefore be included in the agreement."

Negotiations need to address delicate sectors and industries that each party will want to protect. While these aren't major obstacles, time is required to find solutions that work for everyone.

"The negotiations should also take into account sensitivities on both sides. The EFTA countries are traditionally sensitive in agricultural sectors where local production exists and where, due to challenging farming conditions, producers are not able to compete with world market prices," Ambassador Rødsmoen stated. "Those issues will nevertheless be addressed during the negotiations to find mutual acceptable solutions."

Moving Quickly

"We hope that once the FTA negotiations are launched, it will not take too long to finish the negotiations

so that we could soon enjoy the benefits of implementation," DG Khun Auramon said. "We also put a great deal of emphasis on raising awareness and providing useful information on the benefits that could be acquired from an FTA to all stakeholders in order to promote the utilisation of agreements and trade cooperation which will stimulate economic activities and drive the country's development effectively."

This includes explaining how the FTA between Thailand and EFTA countries would expand trade and investment opportunities through the elimination and reduction of tariff and non-tariff measures. Another benefit that needs to be made clear to Thai stakeholders is how an agreement provides more choices for consumers and importers of raw material.

Ambassador Rødsmoen added an FTA would eliminate duties on industrial goods, making it easier and cheaper for businesses to export and import products. Its influence is expected to extend far beyond that as well.

"Furthermore, it will open markets for service providers and give contractors access to each other's government procurement markets. EFTA also supports the mutual protection of intellectual property rights and paves the way for investors," the ambassador said.

Services Led

The services sector accounted for 61 percent of Thailand's GDP in 2020 and DG Khun Auramon noted it will play a vital role moving forward. Expanding the services trade is a component of the 20-year National Strategy of Thailand with this being an area the EFTA countries have a wealth of experience in.

"The services trade can contribute to country-wide competitiveness because of its critical linkages with other sectors of the economy," DG Khun Auramon said. "Indeed, trade in services is essential for steering the economy and Thailand's realisation of inclusive growth, enhanced social welfare, and sustainable development. The resumption of FTA negotiations between Thailand and the EFTA countries will undoubtedly make a substantial contribution to Thailand's services-led growth strategy."

The Director-General also believes the implementation of an FTA would enhance the level of market opening which can lead to a more stable and predictable business environment for the bilateral services trade.

This will be welcomed by the EFTA countries with the Norwegian and Swiss business communities among those who have pushed for the liberalisation of Thailand's service industry over the years. In particular, there has been a call to allow overseas firms to fully own their Thai subsidiaries without having to seek

foreign business licenses or having to fulfil complicated regulations.

"An FTA between Thailand and the EFTA countries is expected to provide enhanced conditions and open up services investment for both markets. This will help unlock the great potential of growth in services trade and investment between Thailand and the EFTA countries," DG Khun Auramon pointed out.

She stressed that an FTA will stimulate more high-quality investments in the Kingdom's Thailand 4.0 policy and the BCG economic model in addition to supporting the 20-year National Strategy of Thailand. A number of industries under the various plans have been highlighted as a priority.

"These targeted industries are medical and healthcare services; tourism; bio-industry; aviation; logistics; and digital technology," DG Khun Auramon said. "An FTA will also serve as an important opportunity for investors and entrepreneurs in both markets, especially in high-technology fields where the EFTA countries have expertise." ■

Above: The Thai-EFTA Business Circle was launched on 17 December 2020. From left to right in front: Thai-Norwegian Chamber President, Axel Blom, Michel Maesuli of Oerlikon Balzers Coating (Thailand) representing Liechtenstein, Swiss-Thai Chamber Executive Director David Stauffacher, H.E. Swiss Ambassador Helene Budliger Artieda, DG of Thailand's Department of Trade Negotiations, Khun Auramon Supthaweethum, Swiss-Thai Chamber President, Bruno Odermatt, H.E. Norwegian Ambassador Kjersti Rødsmoen, Prof. Dr. Kriengsak Charoenwongsak, President of the Institute of Future Studies for Development and Khun Chusak Chuenphuay, Vice Chairman of the Thai Chamber of Commerce

Facts

■ FTA negotiations between Thailand and the European Free Trade Association could resume in early 2022
The last round of negotiations between the two sides concluded in January 2006

■ Liberalisation of the services sector will be a key element of any free trade agreement

■ There is hope a potential FTA will support Thailand's Bio-Circular-Green Economic Model by transferring knowledge

■ With an FTA in place, Thai exports to the EFTA countries would increase by 38 percent while imports from member countries would rise by 14.8 percent

■ Norwegian exports to Thailand were up 34% in 2021 as compared to 2020

■ Thai exports to Norway were up 98% in 2021 as compared to 2020



PHOTO: PRIVATE

These days, you can't go a few blocks without seeing the Jotun logo in Thailand. It wasn't always that way.

Jotun, a Pioneer

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

When the paint manufacturer began operations in the Kingdom nearly 55 years ago, it encountered fierce competition along with other challenges.

Mr Bjørn Granerød first arrived in the country two years after the firm began operations and received a truly warm welcome upon his arrival.

"I landed at Don Muang Airport in April 1970 on the hottest day of the year. It was about 45-degrees Celsius. On the tarmac, it felt like at least 60 degrees," Mr Granerød explained. "The intense heat made me think about returning to Norway the very same day. But I stayed and eventually I adjusted to the heat and the climate."

As a company, Jotun needed to differentiate itself. After struggling in the housepaint market early on, it opted to focus on protective and marine paints where the firm had more knowhow and experience than competitors.

Mr Granerød noted that the decision began paying dividends as the 1970s progressed. This encouraged Jotun to enter related fields, such as powder coatings.

"We established the very first powder coatings production facility in 1977 when Corro-Coat (Thailand) Ltd. was born. No one else had ever

attempted to produce such coatings in East Asia before, mainly due to the high temperatures needed. But after many difficulties, we succeeded in our efforts and never looked back," Mr Granerød recalled.

In the early 1980s, the company tried again to gain a foothold in the housepaint market after establishing itself as a leader for protective and marine coatings in Thailand. For Jotun, this meant finding ways to stand out in a crowded marketplace.

"We brought in experts on marketing and sales to promote our products nationwide. With that followed the introduction of mixing machines into our dealers' shops which revolutionised the number of colours available to customers," Mr Granerød stated. "The switch in strategy turned out to be a success. Housepaints are a big part of our overall sales today."

Of course, Mr Granerød and Jotun encountered challenges along the way. This includes one problem modern-day businesses still encounter.

"Traffic was, if possible, even slower

than today. There were not so many cars on the roads back then, but there were fewer roads available. The average speed during rush hour was 3-6 kilometres per hour," Mr Granerød detailed. "Business and customer service were rather hard to execute. No mobile phones were available. It was telex only. So, it was far more difficult to communicate or visit customers."

Sometimes communication with customers didn't go as planned. In the early 1980s, faulty raw materials caused some white paint to turn grey within weeks of application. The company was forced to repaint numerous houses over a short time. Most people understood, although one gentleman had a rather unique way of lodging his complaint.

"A guy came into our office wanting to know when we would repaint his now greyish house. I explained we would do the job as soon as possible, but that he had to wait his turn," Mr Granerød recounted. "He looked at me and asked again, this time pulling out a large gun and pointing it at me. I got his message and told him we could start the very same afternoon. You don't negotiate with such people, neither in Thailand nor anywhere else. And you don't make a big thing out of it either."

While incidents like that aren't the norm, they certainly made life interesting for Mr Granerød. However, it is the people who had the most profound impact on him, both professionally and personally.

"Except for the very top management, all leading positions at Jotun are occupied by locals. This was our aim from the very beginning. The skill and loyalty of the local population must be honoured and utilised to its fullest extent," Mr Granerød said. "And the locals certainly lived up to our hopes."

Now enjoying his retirement, Mr Granerød still spends winters in Thailand. It's certainly a far cry from standing on the sweltering tarmac at Don Muang Airport in 1970 with nothing more than some clothing and a toothbrush.

"When I arrived in 'The Land of Smiles' in 1970, I had nothing more or less. When I left Thailand in 1995, I had everything. A loving wife, two lovely daughters, lots of friends, countless memories and some money. I cannot thank Jotun and the Thai people enough for giving me this period of my life which has been so important. I would not give it away for anything in this world," Mr Granerød proclaimed. ■

Above: Mr. Bjørn Granerød, a Jotun pioneer who led the company to success in Thailand during a 25-year period. He is now a happy retiree who still loves Thailand



PHOTO: H2 SEATING

Mr Nils Gunnar Hjellegjerde found himself with an interest in Thailand as the Asian Financial Crisis was unfolding

Past and Future Perspectives

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

His family acquired a company which held a Thai-Norwegian joint venture in the furniture business. That started an adventure resulting in a number of businesses and thousands of employment opportunities.

From being introduced to Thailand during the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 to serving as Thai-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce President from 2002 to 2003 and a continuing presence in the Kingdom to this day, Mr Nils Gunnar Hjellegjerde offers a unique perspective on both the past and present.

Over the years, Mr Hjellegjerde has established three businesses in Thailand in addition to serving as President of the Thai-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce in 2002-2003. From a business perspective, the country has made improvements, but he also notes there are challenges remain from the time he first arrived.

"Doing business in Thailand has become a bit easier. It is a combination of gradual improvement and digitalisation. Transparency has also increased making it easier to navigate as well as shed light on things that need to be improved," Mr Hjellegjerde said. "But some of the challenges are the same today as they were back then. There are still a lot of regulations that remain somewhat blurred and hard to understand the purpose of. This makes it hard for newcomers to manage and steer effectively."

Perhaps the greatest improvements have come from the Office of the Board of Investment (BOI). Mr Hjellegjerde cites its key role in supporting Thailand's efforts to be more open to foreign investment as a notable step forward.

"The BOI in general is a huge success. Things are now easier with the BOI One Start One Stop Investment Center. Our companies are BOI supported and that helped a lot. Especially the first one as I was quite new to Thailand. We received tax benefits, duty exemption, easy access to work permits and ability to own land," Mr Hjellegjerde pointed out.

While these advancements are a step in the right direction, Mr Hjellegjerde stresses that progress is relative. If Thailand improves but others do so at the same speed or faster, the country will not find itself in a better position. His business experience in Vietnam provides an interesting frame of reference.

"The challenge for Thailand is that the world is not standing still. When you compare it to Vietnam, where I set up two factories, you see they have more transparent regulations that make it easier for newcomers to understand," Mr Hjellegjerde explained. "Thailand's hesitation to engage in comprehensive trade agreements might also be a disadvantage compared to other countries. I think trade agreements and good international relationships will be critical for Thailand in the years to come."

It also means the country needs to clean up other troublesome areas, such

as slow VAT refunds process and import duties, which cause uncertainty and extra cost among foreign businesses. However, if Thailand is to truly be competitive, Mr Hjellegjerde believes it must invest in education and infrastructure.

"The most important resource is the human factor. The countries that can retrain and upskill will attract investors and businesspeople. This investment can create high-paying jobs and improve the wellbeing of Thai people," Mr Hjellegjerde stated.

According to Mr Hjellegjerde, a possible solution would be partnerships between the private and education sectors. He would like to see this focus on fields where there are currently talent shortages. Of course, education efforts need to be supplemented by activity in other areas.

"Infrastructure is also critical. That includes everything from internet and digitalising infrastructure to transportation, ports and the cost of moving products," Mr Hjellegjerde said. "Finally, I think Thailand needs to embrace sustainability even more. Not just as a slogan but as a prerequisite in everything we do."

The Thai-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce also has a role to play when it comes to improving the business climate and supporting Norwegian companies.

"The Chamber was created as a venue where Norwegian businesspeople could share experiences, learn from each other and brainstorm on how to improve the business environment in the country," Mr Hjellegjerde explained. "But we have to be realistic. The Norwegian business community in Thailand is small. We must work together with other chambers as well as the Joint Foreign Chamber of Commerce to draw attention to these issues and get them improved."

"Despite some of the shortcomings of the country, I have chosen Thailand as the home for our family and we have raised our children in the Kingdom" ends Mr Hjellegjerde. ■

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PHOTO: THAILAND BOARD OF INVESTMENT

There are currently numerous opportunities for foreign businesses in Thailand. A lot of people don't realise how the Board of Investment can assist firms in the service sector.

Opportune Time

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Opportunities include everything from incentives and exemptions for investment in the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) economy to support for firms in the services sector.

"One of the biggest misunderstandings as it relates to the BOI is that we only deal with manufacturing. We have actually covered services for many decades. Around 20 percent of BOI categories are focused on services," BOI Secretary General, Ms Duangjai Asawachintachit, notes. "These play an important role in the BOI scheme and we continue to explore ways to improve this. For example, clinical research is now BOI eligible. More service-focused categories are being constantly added."

While the organisation's ability to assist foreign investment from large firms in more traditional industries, such as automotive and electronics, is well known, the BOI's work extends far beyond it. There is an emphasis on supporting small businesses in both manufacturing and services.

"We want to assist smaller businesses and encourage them to look at how and where they may be eligible for BOI support," Ms Duangjai explains. "The BOI doesn't only cover large companies or those in large sectors. Our stats show many companies participating

in BOI schemes are smaller ones such as software development companies."

Ms Duangjai adds the BOI is mindful of the rapidly evolving business landscape along with the support foreign startups, SMEs and other low-capital companies need to invest in Thailand.

"The BOI's financial threshold isn't prohibitive, and we also give special considerations to both SMEs and low-capital companies. We don't always focus on fixed assets and for some sectors we can look at minimum hiring expenditures instead," Ms Duangjai says. "Businesses who aren't sure how they fit in should talk to us and see where the potential is. The BOI scheme is constantly changing as we look to stay up to date with technology and trends."

BCG Economy Opportunities

The BOI is working to promote Thailand's BCG economic model as well. Overseas investment is seen as vital for these efforts to integrate the bioeconomy, circular economy and green economy.

"Thailand has a lot of bio-

diversity and a strong supply chain, but we need to enhance value added creation and productivity enhancement. The BOI provides support to a wide range of bio-based activities, including a focus on expanding research and development activities and application of technologies," Ms Duangjai states. "That is why we are promoting smart farming services. We are also offering import duty exemptions on materials needed for research and development."

As for the circular and green economies, the BOI continues to look at ways it can support and promote these efforts. Ms Duangjai points out incentives have been put into place for those using eco-friendly technologies as an example of what is being done.

"Recently, we approved a new measure to incentivise companies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Companies can now apply for tax incentives when looking to do this," Ms Duangjai details. "For example, a chemical manufacturer that wants to purchase new machinery to reduce emissions output can propose an investment plan to the BOI and receive the incentives directly. Additionally, there is no need to expand capacities as part of this plan."

The adoption of automation and robotics and digitalisation is another area where the BOI been promoting to enhance productivity in Thailand. Attractive incentives are offered to companies wanting to invest in machinery upgrades and systems that enable them to reach the country's Industry 4.0 status.

Room for Improvement

Even with many foreign investment opportunities available, Ms Duangjai believes that there is always some room for enhancing the ease of doing business in the country. This is something that is very important for the BOI.

"People want to invest in places where it is easy and clear to do so. We are constantly looking at ways we can improve," she says. "We are always looking for feedback from businesses on what can be done better."

Digitisation is vital to improvement efforts. The BOI has launched e-services and is working on digital certificates which will hopefully be launched in 2022. This would not only eliminate the need for paper copies but allow for information to constantly remain up to date. It also continues to explore other processes which could be digitised. ■

Above: BOI Secretary General Ms Duangjai Asawachintachit encourages foreign companies of all sizes to speak with the organisation



Aibel Thailand has completed some massive projects. But the biggest move of all may be its transition from oil and gas activities to ones in the renewable sector.

Going Big

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Aibel Thailand's growing capabilities have led to it taking on, and completing, some massive projects. The Johan Sverdrup Process Platform II set a record for the heaviest single lift completed by Aibel.

When Aibel began exploring renewable energy opportunities in 2010, it wasn't seen as a replacement for the oil and gas business but as a supplement to it. The first important milestone of the transition was winning a contract from Equinor to work on the world's first floating offshore wind farm, the Hywind Scotland project.

Eventually, the new focus extended to its Laem Chabang yard in Thailand. In 2019, Aibel was awarded a contract by the SSE Renewables and Equinor consortium to work on Dogger Bank Wind Farm, the world's largest offshore wind farm. It was announced that construction of the topsides would happen in the Kingdom.

"The transition to renewables

initially began a couple of years ago when Aibel started with the design concept of the current Dogger Bank High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) platform that is being assembled here in Thailand," Mr Nigel Whiting, Aibel Thailand Managing Director, says. "Many of the skills are transferable from the oil and gas industry to renewables, with more focus on structural and EIT work than piping though."

That was important as it allowed the firm to avoid obstacles such as retraining or investment in new machinery. It could instead focus on getting to work.

"We have worked closely with our clients and partners during the development of the design of the HVDC

platform and ensured we incorporate all the input as requested for the smooth operation of it once installed," Mr Whiting reports.

Aibel Thailand is now looking at scaling up its capacity. More renewable sector projects are likely in the coming years which means it is important for the company to be ready. That being said, work in the oil and gas sector isn't going anywhere.

"We are looking to increase our capacity here in Thailand to ensure that we have sufficient for all the upcoming projects. We see that our main growth over the coming years will be in the renewables sector as many of the oil and gas majors are looking to reduce their carbon footprint, along with Aibel also," Mr Whiting notes. "We will still have also work on oil and gas projects, supporting our clients as required."

While growth is planned behind the scenes, work continues on fabricating and assembling the HVDC topside for the Dogger Bank Wind Farm project. Once finished, the gigantic structures will be transported to Aibel's yard in Haugesund, Norway before eventually being put into operation.

"There will be three in total (topside) each weighing approximately



PHOTO: AIBEL/ØVIND GRAVÅS AND JAN ARNE WOLD

7600 metric tonnes, which once completed will be shipped to Haugesund for outfitting with Hitachi Energy's latest generation HVDC converter technology," Mr Whiting explains. "Once they are installed and operational in the North Sea, the three Dogger Bank projects will form the world's largest offshore wind farm, supplying power to 4.5 million homes in the UK."

Setting Records

As Aibel Thailand was beginning work on the Dogger Bank Wind Farm project, it was simultaneously putting the finishing touches on another massive task, the Johan Sverdrup Process Platform II (JSP2). This was a challenge, but one the company was prepared for.

"(The challenge) is ensuring that engineering deliverables and materials arrive in the correct execution sequence to ensure the schedule can be achieved," Mr Whiting points out. "We have many tools within Aibel to ensure that everything is tracked and managed on each project."

It sounds easy enough, however, JSP2 was no ordinary project. It set several Aibel Thailand records before departing for the yard in Haugesund early this year. Among the notable

achievements was the heaviest single lift done by the company which, according to Mr Whiting, was about 1,000 metric tonnes for a deck section.

"The JSP2 main support frame (MSF) was the heaviest module we have ever completed here in Thailand, weighing in at just over 16,300 metric tonnes when it was loaded out. It was also the heaviest item to be moved by self propelled modular transporter (SPMT) and also utilised the most SPMT axles ever for one load out," Mr Whiting details.

Before being shipped out to the Johan Sverdrup field in January 2022, processing and converter modules will be assembled at the Haugesund yard. The project represents an enormous accomplishment for the entire Aibel organisation with Mr Whiting recalling a sense of pride when it came time to ship it to Norway in April.

"Upon seeing it leave, I was extremely proud of the entire Aibel Thailand team and all the subcontractors that contributed to the successful completion of it, especially during a challenging period with COVID-19 restrictions," Mr Whiting says. "It is a testament to the entire workforce that we can work together to continue delivery these large complex platforms."

Total manpower for the JSP2 project peaked at around 3,000 people with Mr Whiting adding that Aibel Thailand recorded the best safety performance for any of its projects. These efforts were even recognised at the CEO HSSE Awards.

"The Aibel Thailand site team was just awarded the CEO HSSE Award for 2020 due to excellent safety performance on the JSP2 MSF project, which is a credit to everyone that was involved in the fabrication and assembly, including all of our subcontractors," Mr Whiting proclaims.

When the company was first awarded the contract for the JSP2 project in 2018, the firm knew it was a large task. For Aibel Thailand, being able to complete the platform showed people what their yard was capable of.

"I think the size of the JSP2 MSF surprised many people, which demonstrated the capabilities of Aibel Thailand to delivery such a huge platform," Mr Whiting states.

Considerable Size

Aibel's operations in Thailand have grown considerably since launching in 2000. Initially known as ABB Offshore Systems, the company started with four employees. That total reached 30 two years later as they eventually outgrew their first home at the Port of Sattahip.

"Due to limitations on the jetty for loading out modules there, Aibel moved to the Port of Map Ta Phut in 2001 and

remained there until 2005. From 2005 onwards, we have been based in the Port of Laem Chabang with an area of 130,000 square metres and increased load out capacity," Mr Whiting notes. "In 2019, we expand our yard area with an additional 120,000 square metres."

The increase in size has allowed Aibel Thailand to tackle bigger projects, such as JSP2 and the Dogger Bank Wind Farm topsides. It also owns a stake in a fabrication shop, Deeline, which specialises in steel structure and piping.

"We also have 40 percent ownership of Deeline in Ban Chang who do all our fabrication work with an area of 170,000 square metres. This has seen our capacity increase from 5,000 tons per year in 2001 to 25,000 tons per year currently," Mr Whiting says. "We also have an engineering office in Ban Chang with space for up to 155 personnel."

Thailand operations are connected to the yard in Norway and an engineering office in Singapore. This synergy is important for the company when working on substantial projects.

"All three locations work together to ensure the successful completion of our projects. This enables Aibel to fabricate and assemble extremely large topside modules at the same time, ensuring we maintain our high standards of quality and safety," Mr Whiting explains.

He cites JSP2 as an example of how the entire company can work as one. The MSF was built in Thailand with engineering and procurement performed in Norway. Two other modules for the platform were fabricated in Europe. All three were then shipped to the Haugesund yard where they are now being joined together. ■

Left: In May 2021, the three large modules constituting the Johan Sverdrup P2 platform were put together in a spectacular lifting and assembly operation outside Gismarvik in Færresfjorden, Norway. One of the modules was built at Aibel's yard in Laem Chabang, Thailand. The operation was performed with the world's largest crane vessel, Sleipnir.

Facts

- Aibel Thailand was launched in 2000 and moved to its current Laem Chabang yard in 2005
- Aibel began exploring renewable energy opportunities in 2010
- The Thailand arm recently started work on its first renewables project, the Dogger Bank HVDC
- In April, local work concluded on the Johan Sverdrup Process Platform II and it was shipped to Norway
- The project set several Aibel Thailand records including the heaviest single lift done by the company
- Roughly 3000 people worked on the Johan Sverdrup Process Platform II project at its peak



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PHOTO: OCEAN SUN

With Thailand having committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to just how these will be reached.

Goals in Sight

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of the country's 20-Year National Strategy.

The private sector has an important role to play while Norwegian firms possess the knowledge and experience to be a capable partner. Meanwhile, the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) is uniquely positioned to bring everything together.

There are many obstacles that need to be overcome if Thailand is to reach key environmental targets over the next few decades. Some businesses in the private sector are advancing these efforts even if there remains some uncertainty regarding how some goals will be achieved.

"The world is moving towards sustainable development and the business sector must move with it. A lot of mechanisms are being introduced but we still don't know just how we are going to reach environmental goals, such as net zero emissions, in Thailand," Bangchak President and CEO, Mr Chaiwat Kovavisarath, stated. "People often talk about the social aspects of sustainability, but it is important for the financial side to be self-sufficient as well."

The oil and gas company has diversified beyond its core business into biofuels, renewable energy and other areas under what it calls Greenovation. Mr Chaiwat admits it would have been easy to carry on with what it was doing, but Bangchak felt it necessary to be

proactive and leave their comfort zone.

"Typically, businesses prefer to do what they have always done and don't like leaving what they know. And with the old economy and methods still providing good returns, there has been little need to change. We wanted to move on and bring ourselves out of this comfort zone," Mr Chaiwat says.

Even with firms like Bangchak investing in renewable energy, Thailand as a whole hasn't fully been able to get out of its comfort zone when it comes to power production. The country continues to invest in gas-fired power stations while also flirting with coal, two areas that make it more difficult to reach certain sustainability goals.

"With Thailand investing in gas power stations, there will be a need to recover this investment. It is something that can put renewables at a disadvantage. Some renewable energy, especially solar, is decentralised. This means a bottom-up approach is possible," Dr Per Christer Lund, Technology Counsellor at Innovation Norway, says. "More importantly, Thailand must move away from coal entirely to support its decarbonisation goals."

One potential solution is liquified natural gas (LNG). Dr Lund points out that floating LNG (FLNG), a process

where natural gas is produced, liquefied and stored at sea, would be better aligned with Thailand's environmental ambitions than coal or gas.

FLNG is only a transitional solution, however. The future is in renewables where investments, such as those Bangchak have made, are already contributing to energy production in Thailand. Currently, solar has the largest impact with room for it to grow further.

"Nearly 25 percent of energy capacity in Thailand will be solar by 2036. Many Norwegian companies are already active in the country supplying equipment while others are now looking at future prospects," Dr Lund reports. "Floating solar is coming big time. There are so many resources in Thailand for it as well as a number of benefits. There are also Norwegian companies, like Ocean Sun, who can assist."

Eastward Answers

The Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) project is leading sustainable development efforts on several fronts, including the promotion of investment in the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) economy. This economic model aims to support growth by achieving the United Nations' SDGs, including net zero emissions.

"The concept of sustainable development has been adopted in the EEC specifically for its mission of investment promotion. The EEC has set the target of becoming the first industrial sector in Thailand to be at net zero emissions. (contd. p. 21)

Above: Norwegian company Ocean Sun offers a unique solution to floating solar panels: A thin, one millimetre thick polymer membrane makes it possible for installers to walk on the installation.



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We will focus on reducing carbon emission and encouraging new investment in green and circular projects,” Dr Luxmon Attapich, Deputy Secretary General, EEC Office of Thailand, details.

She continues, “The BCG economy has been laid out as a main priority in Thailand’s development policy as well as a cornerstone for the EEC project. The EEC Office has established guidelines for driving the green and circular economy in three areas: improving energy efficiency; enhancing resource and waste management; and creating a favourable ecosystem.”

The BCG platform was launched out of the need for an interconnected and integrated approach to support green businesses and advance technology and innovation in Thailand. Dr Luxmon states this will allow the EEC to strengthen assistance for targeted industries, such as advanced agriculture and biotechnology; digital; next-generation automotive; and decarbonisation, through the adoption of automation and digital technologies.

Additionally, the EEC has widened the scope of things that fall under the BCG umbrella which will allow officials to engage a wider range of stakeholders. Dr Luxmon believes contributions and engagement from this group are necessary to create an ecosystem that is capable of supporting green industries.

The EEC is already collaborating with international partners in some areas. For example, it has teamed up with the City of Osaka on biogas and biowaste and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation on electric vehicles and battery management. Additionally, the EEC Office is working on the Total Waste Management Project

in Rayong. This waste-to-energy pilot project is a collaboration between local government agencies and a private-sector company.

“The BCG platform is large and inclusive. So, the business opportunities for Norwegian companies are endless in related industries and supply chains they are interested in,” Dr Luxmon says. “Together with the support of the EEC Office and its regulatory sandbox feature, investors will be able to invest in new technologies and pursue innovative business models that utilise disruptive technologies without prohibitive regulatory constraints. Incentive packages are being developed for targeted technologies and their use cases.”

Dr Luxmon adds the EEC’s challenge now is striking the right balance between economic and environmental benefits by using renewable resources to produce food, energy and industrial products sustainably.

Carbon Conclusion

The focus on the BCG economy in the EEC is a key pillar of Thailand reaching the UN SDGs. However, initiatives beyond this are needed to accomplish some goals, such as those related to decarbonisation.

Bangchak formed the Carbon Markets Club alongside 10 other leading organisations in 2021 to raise awareness and promote carbon credit trading through the Thailand Voluntary Emissions Reduction Program launched by the Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organisation and the Renewable Energy Certificate by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand. The key to growing the program is support and clarity.

“We hope the government sees what is happening and takes more serious measures. Carbon trading systems can be a big help. But everyone must work together, and the private sector can play an important part,” Mr Chaiwat notes. “A Cap and Trade system will see big industries, like oil and gas, petrochemical, cement and others, help accelerate transition to clean energy. Also, it is possible for a carbon credit system to be regional or even global if there is a single standard. Right now, we don’t have one.”

In the EEC, work has begun on establishing an emissions trading system for the industrial sector. The Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organisation (TGO) and the Federation of Thai Industries are collaborating to develop carbon credit trading platform which will be piloted in the EEC area.

There is also the possibility for carbon capture and storage (CCS) in Thailand with Dr Lund pointing out the country has the known capacity to store



PHOTO: EEC OFFICE OF THAILAND

Above: Dr Luxmon Attapich, Deputy Secretary General, EEC Office of Thailand

carbon for an estimated 50 years with a potential for further exploration. And it’s not just Thailand that could be a part of this. A regional project could even be viable with incentivisation.

Dr Lund cites Longship, the Norwegian Government’s cross-border, open-source CCS project, and the Northern Lights transport and storage project as an example of what is achievable in terms of decarbonisation on a larger scale.

“Norway has the knowledge and technology to be a partner on a local or regional CCS project. A scheme similar to Longship could be really helpful in leading decarbonisation efforts in all of Asia, including Thailand,” Dr Lund proclaims. “For this to work, there needs to be value in getting rid of CO₂. Businesses will jump on the opportunity once this is established.” ■



PHOTO: BANGCHAK

Above: Bangchak President and CEO, Mr Chaiwat Kovavisarach

Facts

- Thailand committed to the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals as part of the 20-Year National Strategy
- Nearly 25 percent of energy capacity in Thailand will be solar by 2036
- The EEC is taking steps to become the first industrial sector in Thailand to be at net zero emissions
- Several incentives are in place to encourage investment in the BCG economy throughout the EEC
- Bangchak has moved beyond oil and gas and has invested in biofuels and renewable energy among other areas
- The Carbon Markets Club, a carbon credit trading group, was launched by Bangchak and 10 other companies



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The Leading for the Future Conference was launched in 2020 to help corporate decision makers

Building Better Leaders

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

The conference is aimed at creating a platform to better understand the roles, skills and mindset leaders require.

The Leading for the Future Conference seeks to facilitate a space for dialogue that is non-confrontational since no one has all the answers. According to Ms Turid Elisabeth Solvang, Founder & CEO FutureBoards, understanding that and being open to new mindsets is vital for leadership.

"It is important to be open to new perspectives. Sometimes you need to change your thinking. The picture is shifting. It is no longer all about shareholders. Now leaders must focus on stakeholders," she stated. "Of course, it is okay for leaders to say they do not have all the answers, even if this is difficult to admit. Honesty is key. Sometimes you need to change your mind."

That is one of the driving forces behind the theme of this year's conference: Between a Rock and a Hard Place. With companies facing difficult and complex issues, such as climate change, COVID-19 and geopolitical conflict, having the correct systems and mindset in place has become increasingly important.

"We want to do good things, but sometimes that is really hard. The situation Telenor faced in Myanmar is an example of this," Ms Solvang noted. "The Leading for the Future Conference looks to create a dialogue. It is about understanding of what is happening when difficult decisions need to be made and making sure the right systems are in place." These constructive conversations

about what can be done when things get tough serve as an important foundation when it comes time to make difficult decisions.

"My hope is that after the Leading for the Future Conference, attendees leave with a perspective on what defines the people making the decisions. You never know if it is the right or wrong decision being made in the moment, but having leaders with the right mindset helps," Ms Solvang said.

Open The Boardroom

When it comes to decision making, and especially ones made in difficult times, a lot of focus is placed on those leaders at the C-level as well as top managers. Ms Solvang believes it is time to look into the boardroom since that is where final decisions take place.

"Board members are not always visible. We need to know what kind of values they possess. How do they come to their decisions? What are their focus areas? When you see the board in the news, it's usually when there is a conflict with management," Ms Solvang pointed out. "However, we should know what they stand for and why since it is a position of trust."

That is especially true today in a world that is moving faster than ever. Boards that are not keeping up with global events, the company's environment and the power of stakeholders can find themselves at real risk.

"There is no room for error anymore. That is a gamechanger. Access to information is instantaneous and no longer bound by borders. There is no time to reflect or hide. Decision makers must have systems in place to think about the future and be prepared to act quickly," Ms Solvang stated.

This is where the Leading for the Future Conference can be of use. Bringing together different mindsets and perspectives in a constructive setting allows for discussions that may one day lead to a leadership paradigm shift.

"With Norway having been the first country to implement corporate board gender quotas, we have a unique perspective. But we also need to accept that we don't have all the answers," Ms Solvang noted. "It is important to see what works elsewhere. By speaking to each other and understanding these different approaches, we can create better systems for decision making."

Organised by FutureBoards and Aftenposten and with the Financial Times as media partner, this year's Leading for the Future Conference is scheduled to have several notable speakers including Mr Børge Brende, President of the World Economic Forum; Mr Remi Eriksen, DNV Group President and CEO; Ms Vicky Bowman, Director Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business; and Ms Solvang. The 2022 edition will look to further discussions launched over the past two years.

"One of the key takeaways from our previous conferences is that there is now a larger interest in what's going on in the boardroom. There is a greater reflection about who should be serving on boards," Ms Solvang reported. "These conversations and questions are hopefully ones attendees can have at their own companies." ■

Above: Ms Turid Elisabeth Solvang, Founder of Futureboards at one of the many conferences at which she shares her thoughts.



PHOTO: SCG

SCG Chemicals' efforts to advance the circular economy and reach crucial environmental goals have seen the group search far and wide for partners.

Creating a Larger Circle

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

The size and scope of challenges presented by plastics means well-known multinational corporations, startups and even competitors are now working together.

Recently, SCG Chemicals and Braskem, a Brazilian petrochemical company and the world's leading in bio-based polyethylene producer, signed a memorandum of understanding to explore the opportunities of producing sugar-based plastics in Thailand.

Two competitors coming together in this manner would have been unlikely ten years ago, but a need to advance the circular economy and reach environmental goals means cooperation is now key.

"The industry is much more global and more mature. We now understand the value of cooperation," Dr Tine Rørvik, Global Director Circular Economy, SCG and Innovation Director Europe, Chemicals Business, states. "We realise the task in front of us in achieving various goals, including the Paris climate agreement 1.5-degree Celsius target, is large. If we are all working together, we

can make a bigger difference."

This is not a one-off agreement. It is part of the company's strategy to build the leading circular economy network. From being a founding member of the Alliance to End Plastic Waste to locating SMEs who share the same goals, SCG Chemicals knows it does not have all the answers.

"It is important to have an active strategy. You don't want to suffer from the 'that's not invented syndrome' because it stands in the way of progress," Dr Rørvik points out. "The circular economy is changing the industry, but you can't make it circular alone. We need to be out there connecting with partners."

One of the most notable aspects of this strategy is the group's desire to embrace innovation. It has left its preconceived notions at the door in order to unlock what has the greatest potential to advance the circular economy.

"SCG Chemicals is still young. We want to keep growing and improving. That starts by finding partners who share our mindset and embrace innovation. The size of our partners doesn't matter as long as they can contribute," Dr Suracha Udomsak, Vice President and Chief Technology Officer of SCG Chemicals, notes.

The group's global presence is also proving to be beneficial as it searches for new partners who can collaborate towards building solutions.

"Having a presence in Norway allows us to both understand global circular economy efforts and locate new innovations," Dr Rørvik says. "We can have our eyes and ears open across the world. This is a good way for us to speed up our efforts while working together as a society."

However, it is not always as simple as seeing something that works elsewhere in the world and bringing that to Thailand. For example, Norway and many countries in Europe have adopted regulations to build and sustain a circular economy. Importing these overnight isn't a realistic goal.

"The key here is communication. Not everything can be transferred to Thailand. We look to reach out to stakeholders and talk to everyone so there is a broad-based view of the situation and what can be done," Dr Suracha details. "Engaging stakeholders and creating partnerships at all levels helps us all build not just technical innovations, but more far-reaching changes. We can come

together to see what is working elsewhere and discuss how it can be localised.”

This engagement isn't simply limited to the external partners of SCG Chemicals. Internally, the company strives to keep everyone focused on the task at hand.

“Engagement must happen at all levels, from top to bottom. Both along the value chain and within each company. At SCG Chemicals, all employees are involved in the circular economy efforts. We have a plan to drive things forward,” Dr Rørvik explains. “We have discussed our ambitions, created steps and then made sure everyone was engaged. It is something they now want to be a part of. That doesn't happen by accident.”

Realities of Recycling

Several circular economy milestones have been reached over the past two years despite ongoing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While Dr Suracha believes there is momentum behind the movement in Thailand, many people do not fully understand the difficulties recycling presents.

“Recycling plastic is not as easy as it sounds. You can't simply take plastics and turn them into something else,” Dr Rørvik points out. “For starters, not all plastic is the same. Then you need sorting and cleaning to make sure what has been collected is usable. Finally, there has to be enough volume for brands to actually use the recycled plastic.”

This was a strong consideration for SCG Chemicals as it was drawing up its circular economy roadmap. Eventually, four main areas across the value supply chain were identified as key to driving things forward.

The first area of emphasis is recyclability design and reducing material use. The group seeks to innovate how plastics can be developed with less material while making them easier to recycle.

Next, there is the aim to both extend the life cycle of plastic and create additional value for it. Earlier this year, a collaboration between Unilever and SCG Chemicals was announced that will see the consumer goods company's plastic packaging bottles recycled into new ones using a high quality, post-consumer recycled resin.

SCG Chemicals' circular economy roadmap also looks to advance the recycling process. This includes everything from developing recycling technology to supporting initiatives at the grassroots level.

“Right now, we are working with partners to develop recycling. It is something we need to develop further, but it can make a big difference,” Dr Suracha says. “But we can improve recycling infrastructure at all levels as long as everyone participates. It's why we promote the education and demonstration of waste separation.”

The final focus area for SCG is bioplastics, or the production of plastic from agricultural materials. It is already exploring the possibility of producing sugar-based plastics in Thailand through its partnership with Braskem. Additional projects are in the pipeline.

“We are making strong commitments up and down the value chain. We are actively pursuing all four areas of our circular economy roadmap,” Dr Suracha notes. “Of course, change won't happen overnight because we generate a lot of waste. Plastic is a part of

the modern lifestyle. It has an important role. However, we can continue to innovate how it is made and recycled.”

Unintended Consequences

One common misconception about plastic is that its usage can simply be eliminated altogether. While it is possible to stop using them, this would create other environmental issues.

“The issue isn't plastic itself. The issue is plastic in the wrong places. We understand the problem, but that does not make the challenges we face any less complex. Even if you can find a replacement for plastic, there are unintended consequences,” Dr Rørvik states. “For example, non-plastic food packaging can require more energy to store. That means more energy needs to be produced and if the source isn't renewable, more CO₂ emissions are released.”

Unintended consequences like this arise along the recycling process as well. Transportation, storage and energy are all factors that need to be considered, especially as more partners and people become involved.

“It is important to have a long-term perspective where we look beyond the act of recycling alone. I think a lot of the technology is there when it comes to recycling itself,” Dr Rørvik reports. “But infrastructure and other parts of the process can be improved upon and implemented in all communities around in ASEAN.”

This is why partnerships across the value chain are so important to SCG Chemicals. The company doesn't have the knowledge, experience and capabilities required to solve all the challenges and unintended consequences that arise.

“Solving circularity requires us all to look everywhere for answers and seeing what works where. It is not a case if SCG Chemicals takes this action, we reduce plastic waste or carbon emission. Everything is interconnected and we must act together,” Dr Rørvik concludes. ■



PHOTO: SCG

Above left: SCG'S sustainable office location at the iconic Powerhouse Telemark in Porsgrunn, Norway. Above: SCG Chemicals collaborates with partners regardless of size or location to reach circular economy goals

Facts

- SCG Chemicals signed an MOU with Braskem to explore the opportunities of producing sugar-based plastics in Thailand.
- SCG Chemicals' circular economy roadmap focuses on four main areas across the value supply chain.
- Unilever and SCG announced a partnership to recycle packaging bottles into new ones using post-consumer recycled resin.
- SCG Chemicals is searching for partnerships across the value chain to help close the circular economy loop.



PHOTO: STARBOARD

Whether it be new product lines, sustainability efforts or its award-winning water sports equipment, Starboard is always looking at what's next both in and out of the water.

The 10x Wave

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Innovation is constantly guiding Starboard to do better. Those who participate in water sports are most likely familiar with Starboard.

Starboard was founded by former professional windsurfer and Olympian Mr Svein Rasmussen in 1994, the brand has become synonymous with both success and sustainability over the years.

On the water, Starboard has won 13 out of the last 14 Professional Windsurfers Association Constructors Titles and racked up countless other honours. Meanwhile, its environmental efforts include the creation of Thor Heyerdahl Climate Park. Founded and led by legendary Norwegian climate fighter Dr Arne Fjørtoft, the park can now capture 10 million tons of CO₂ over 20 years. Mr Rasmussen confirmed that Starboard is responsible for planting one million trees in the park and is aiming to plant one million trees annually moving forward.

The company's desire to innovate and educate saw it look to arenas beyond the water. This led Starboard to the apparel industry with the launch of SOMWR. Part environmental movement and part clothing brand, the outfitter is

helping bring Starboard's sustainability initiatives, such as being a minimum of 10x carbon positive, to a new audience.

"We all have to start somewhere. Our attempts in finding and sharing simple solutions to environmental challenges for water sports can be taken to a larger audience. We felt that apparel might be an efficient space where we can share messages, build awareness and see 'fighting for the future' become a fashion statement," Mr Rasmussen, Starboard Chief Innovation Officer, explains. "Our task is to make SOMWR a leader in the apparel industry, which is now responsible for 10 percent of global CO₂ emissions."

He points out that the cotton industry is a main polluter of soils and oceans through chemical fertilisers while polyester products are a major source of ocean microplastics due to the loss of fibres during washing. SOMWR only uses organically grown materials, focusing mostly on Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) certified

cotton. The brand also takes part in other notable sustainability efforts.

"We will now collect 1.1 kilograms of beach ocean plastic and plant a mangrove tree for every item sold. Our profit and loss is plant and litter collection based and the first goal is 10 million mangrove trees planted and 11 million kilograms of beach ocean plastic collected," Mr Rasmussen states. "In January, we will introduce the SOMWR token, blockchain and non-fungible token (NFT) based on the carbon neutral Celo blockchain which turns environmental efforts into profits."

Mr Rasmussen cites highly respected technology investor and venture capitalist Mr John Doerr as an inspiration for the company's decision to explore new areas and catch its next wave.

"The amazing Mr Doerr proclaims that our planet's next huge wave in terms of economic opportunities is the blend of environmental protection and innovative technologies. He has proven to be right about most things at both Intel and Google," Mr Rasmussen says. "For us, the future is SOMWR and our Tiki symbol is the eco-hero that is showcased on the SOMWR campaigns."

In November, SOMWR was invited to and organised a panel debate alongside Fridays for Future Germany strategy leader, French politicians, the World Sailing organisation's sustainability manager, the International Canoe Federation president and the

CEOs from the world's largest water sports events.

The talk looked at ways to encourage the Olympic games in Paris to not only go climate positive, but 10X climate positive. It was a showcase for how sports can be more ambitious than politicians while sharing important messages worldwide.

"Going carbon neutral is not enough as that alone does not reduce the climate gasses we already have emitted. That's why we want to motivate Paris 2024 to go 10X climate positive. It is a way to reach billions of sports interested people with a message about ambitious natural climate solutions," Mr Rasmussen reports.

An interesting alliance was formed in Starboard's home of Thailand when the company signed a Memorandum of Understanding with leading cement producer SCG in 2019. The duo has worked on using discarded cement bags in the inner lining for Starboard board bags as well as climate parks Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam while developing other potential projects.

"When Ms Kjersti Rødsmoen, the Norwegian Ambassador to Thailand and Cambodia, and Mr Axel Blom and introduced us to Dr Tine Rørvik, Global Director Circular Economy, SCG and Innovation Director Europe, and her crew at SCG, we were perhaps partners at first sight," Mr Rasmussen explains. "It's interesting to see a company like SCG working on how to reduce their emissions to minimise their general company tax while framing climate change as an opportunity instead of a barrier."

Always Innovating

The story of Starboard is one of innovation as it is always striving to

make improvements across all aspects of business. This is something that started back in 1994 with the launch of the windsurfing company in Thailand.

"From 1994 to 1999, we worked incredibly hard but had loads of good fun as well. To create a new brand with USD 10,000 was tough and we were often told that the last thing the world needed was a new windsurfing brand. However, we had a lot of people cheering for us too," Mr Rasmussen recalls. "We did things differently. We built super-light sandwich boards with Australian pine and employed the inventor of windsurfing, Jim Drake. He is the man behind the X15, the plane that after over 50 years still holds the highest speed ever recorded by a crewed powered aircraft."

As the company grew and its products became more popular worldwide, there was a realisation that it was one of the larger polluters in the water sports industry. In 2015, a group advisor urged Mr Rasmussen to look beyond its sports equipment world in search of new inspiration.

"This led us to look for ways work on our carbon footprint. We now include both plastic and carbon footprint calculations on most of our products and then indicate how we make them 10X carbon positive by natural climate solutions," Mr Rasmussen points out.

This presented the company with another obstacle. It has needed to explain the things it has learned about carbon and ocean plastic to customers and help them see the value in live ecosystems as opposed to dead ones.

"It's a fun challenge to find ways to educate our customers about environmental issues and solutions through our product stories." Mr

Rasmussen states. "Nature is underrated in the climate debate. We somehow trust possible future man-made carbon capture machines more than the natural carbon capture method that has proven itself forever."

Additionally, Starboard has made numerous changes over the years to help it improve sustainability. The company installed solar panels at its suburban Bangkok headquarters to be self-reliant when it comes to energy. The water sports firm also teamed up with several organisations, including Parley for the Oceans and Trash Hero, on local clean-up efforts.

Environmental innovation is only one aspect of what Starboard does. It is committed to developing new products that win world championships and magazine tests. To that end, the company's boards have won six out of the last eight gold medals at the ICF SUP World Championships in addition to being named SUPconnect Magazine's Brand of the Year two years in a row.

"For us, it's all about creating equipment that makes easy for anyone to get started with our sports and to further develop gear that helps the best athletes win," Mr Rasmussen notes. "Between SUP, windsurfing, kiteboarding and wingboarding, we develop perhaps 200 brand new shapes every year."

Starboard and Mr Rasmussen are even helping the Olympics innovate. At Paris 2024, 40 years after he appeared at the games, the iQFoil windsurfing class will be held for the very first time with the company being active in supporting these efforts.

"In the run up to the Olympics, we have helped arrange all the global championships since being selected in 2019," Mr Rasmussen states. "We have also introduced an iQFoil junior and youth class as a pathway to the Olympics and to improve the retention rate in sailing as it's more exciting for most riders to foil on a windsurfing board than sitting down in a dinghy." ■



PHOTO: STARBOARD

Above left: Mr Svein Rasmussen founded Starboard as windsurfing brand based in Thailand nearly 30 years ago Above: The Tiki logo and the new SOMWR, part environmental movement and part clothing brand are core elements of Starboard's branding initiatives

Facts

- Starboard launched SOMWR, an apparel company, to help its environment messaging reach a larger audience
- Both Starboard and SOMWR are 10X climate positive companies and all products are 10X climate positive
- For every SOMWR product sold, 1.1 kilograms of beach ocean plastic is collected, and a mangrove tree is planted
- Starboard is supporting the launch of the iQFoil windsurfing class at the 2024 Olympic games
- Starboard is introducing the 10X climate positive concept as part of an environmental task force through ICF, PWA, iQFoil and driving water sports events



PHOTO: YARA (THAILAND)

Yara is far more prevalent in Thailand than people realise. From the country's sprawling farmlands to the digital shelves of e-commerce, its product and impact can be felt just about everywhere.

Digging Deeper

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Most people are familiar with Yara's distinguished history in Thailand. An image of King Rama V sitting in a car outside the company's office in Norway can be found on the Thai 100-baht banknote.

The story of His Majesty returning to the Kingdom with Yara fertiliser is a source of pride for both countries.

For nearly 50 years, Yara Fertiliser has been active in Thailand. However, the public may not realise is just how prevalent the brand is. Many Bangkokians have likely seen Yara fertiliser sail right past them and not even known it.

"In Thailand, Yara is the single biggest importer of product from Norway in terms of volume. Our warehouse is equal to 10 football pitches," Mr Mehdi Saint-Andre, Yara VP - Thailand and Myanmar, recalls. "What people may not realise is many of those barges on the Chao Phraya River are carrying our bulk fertiliser. It is going from the ship to our facility in Ayutthaya. More than 50,000 tonnes per shipment make the journey."

Yara's contributions extend far beyond its products as the company looks to make a positive social impact. Sometimes these are high-profile efforts while other endeavours may not be as well known but remain important nonetheless.

"There are times when we know we must step in. For example, during the Tham Luang cave rescue in 2018, there were farmers who had to give up their land as they drained water from the cave during the evacuation. We made sure to assist them in aftermath," Mr Saint-Andre explains. "During Thailand's first COVID-19 lockdown, we donated fertiliser to 500 mango farmers in Pijit province who lost their both local and export markets because of the situation. These actions are how our company can contribute and make a difference."

He also points to the company's diversity and inclusion programme as another way it is making a positive social impact. The local Yara team in Thailand has taken ownership of these efforts to ensure they lead to real change.

"Farming, especially on the front lines, can be a male-dominated industry. Making it more inclusive is something high on our agenda. We have created programs that support women becoming agronomists. This is encouraging and inspiring the next generation," Mr Saint-

Andre details. "We have found ways to support making farming more accessible to people with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community."

These efforts are boosted by the fact everyone in the farming community knows and trusts Yara. They have worked side-by-side with farmers, retailers and dealers for decades. "We are now seeing a third generation of farmers using Yara fertiliser. There are a lot of local entrepreneurs in Thailand who have grown their own business alongside Yara. We have 150 dealers and more than 5,000 retailers who have built a relationship with us," Mr Saint-Andre says. "This means a great deal to us. Everyone still wants to sell Yara and farmers in Thailand continue to use our products after all these years."

Avoiding Disruption

Disruption isn't a word thrown around much in the farming industry. While processes can be upgraded and efficiency improved upon, there are certain aspects of it that are impossible to disrupt. However, the COVID-19 pandemic still required Yara to rethink some of its business operations.

"At the end of the day, farming is a physical business. It has been disruption proof to a certain extent. But even then, we don't want to wait around for someone to find a way to disrupt what we do," Mr Saint-Andre points out. "One of the challenges we faced during the COVID-19 pandemic was figuring out how to digitise interactions with farmers."

Meeting with them face-to-face is very important for the company but that wasn't possible during the pandemic. We wanted this dialogue to remain ongoing and developed a platform to stay connected."

Smart farming continues to be an area of emphasis for Yara. So, while the past 18 months saw the company look to increase digitisation, such as launching the Yara Fertiliser flagship store on Lazada, these advancements were still aligned with long-term ambitions.

"A few years ago, we met with dtac about working together to create the KasetGo application. Our vision was for these two Norwegian companies to come together and build a platform where farmers could share knowledge. This wasn't a dtac- or Yara-branded endeavour. It was focused on developing something useful for the industry since farmers trust other farmers more than anyone else," Mr Saint-Andre recounts.

He continued, "We want to help farmers make data-driven decisions with the application. Whether it is information about weather or having the ability to read leaves, it helps them be more efficient."

This new technology is allowing it to offer farmers value beyond product. Mr Saint-Andre believes digital offerings may bring the company new customers down the road and could help Yara shift from being solely a product-based company to one that can provide services as well.

Digitisation is also changing the way Yara and its vast network of dealers and retailers throughout the country collaborate. Thailand was the first market to test the Yara Connect, an application which brought all three groups together.

"While the company is able to meet regularly with dealers, interacting with the more than 5,000 retailers proved to be difficult. Even then, we didn't want to bypass the dealers directly," Mr Saint-Andre states. "With Yara Connect, we can bring everyone together on the distribution side to share knowledge and find solutions to pain points. Ultimately, the app helps everyone move their business forward."

One thing Yara remains mindful of in all aspects of its digital transformation is efficiency. According to Mr Saint-Andre, the company isn't looking to remove layers. Instead, it wants to improve upon what has already been built. "The physical presence and relationships we have through our entire network is something tech companies can't match," Mr Saint-Andre says. "The goal with technology is to make the ecosystem more efficient and build on our presence and relationships."

Sustainability with Understanding

Yara's sustainability initiatives are carried out understanding the sensitivities of farmers. The company does not want them alone to bear the cost of these efforts which can place

undue pressure on them.

"Farmers are sensitive to cost. Many find themselves in a tough spot. They don't control a lot of what happens, and this means they tend to focus on short-term benefits. It's vital we incentivise sustainability, so it makes sense for them to participate in programs," Mr Saint-Andre notes.

One way to accomplish this is by rethinking how sustainability is supported through the value chain. The company is currently working with farmers and food manufacturers like Pepsi Co. in Thailand to help create sustainable value chains.

"If you combine incentivised sustainability with a value-chain approach, then you can make sure the process is sustainable without one party needing to carry the entire cost," Mr Saint-Andre reports.

As for what the company is doing, its sustainability efforts now extend to the production and transportation processes as the brand strives to reduce carbon emissions. This includes plans to fully remove CO₂ emissions from its Porsgrunn ammonia production which would create emission-free shipping fuels and decarbonised food solutions.

Yara is also looking to make its highly recognisable packaging more environmentally friendly. While the bags themselves are rarely thrown away, Mr Saint-Andre cites the launch of the Rak Tong Laak project as one way the company is encouraging plastic use reduction and upcycling. The program has created collection centres where people can leave bags should they no longer want them.

"The first key to sustainability is knowledge. Digital advancements allow us to better understand the issues and how we can improve. Perhaps the most important lesson learned over the years is efficiency. Yara has long asked farmers to apply product more effectively and remains committed to this. But this is a start. We continue to find new ways to further our sustainability efforts extending from farms to the entire value chain," Mr Saint-Andre concludes. ■



PHOTO: YARA (THAILAND)

Above left: Mr Mehdi Saint-Andre, Yara VP - Thailand and Myanmar explains that the company increased digitisation during the pandemic. Above: Yara is committed to providing farmers with digital tools while maintaining its physical presence and relationships.

Facts

- The Yara Fertiliser flagship store was launched on Lazada as part of the company's digitalisation efforts
- Yara and dtac worked together to create the KasetGo application, a platform to help farmers make data-driven decisions
- The company's newly launched Rak Tong Laak project is encouraging plastic use reduction and upcycling of its bags
- Yara donated fertiliser to 500 mango farmers in Pijit province during the COVID-19 lockdown



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dtac **business**



PHOTO: YARA

A partnership between a fertiliser manufacturer and a mobile operator may not make a lot of sense on the surface

Ready, Set, Kaset Go

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Dtac and Yara saw something others did not. The pair came together to develop Kaset Go, a mobile application that supports farmers in Thailand with knowledge, data and other information.

Telenor-owned dtac and Yara have been assisting Thai farmers in their own ways for some time now. The mobile operator worked to promote connectivity throughout the agriculture industry. Meanwhile, the fertiliser giant has become a trusted partner in the farming sector due to not only its products but also the knowledge it shares.

These efforts were separate until Mr Mehdi Saint-Andre, Yara VP - Thailand and Myanmar, read an article on dtac's efforts to assist the agricultural sector. He felt there was the potential to do something together that could improve the livelihoods of farmers and support a sustainable agriculture ecosystem in Thailand.

"The project came together as sort of a crazy idea and began at a very informal level. It started with a conversation through the Thai-Norway Chamber of Commerce. Even though Yara and Telenor are these two large Norwegian companies, early on in the process we understood our efforts had to be localised," Mr Mehdi Saint-Andre, Yara VP - Thailand and Myanmar, explains. "Partnerships involving two very large companies like this aren't always easy to create and maintain. It has been a positive experience working together."

In early 2020, dtac and Yara announced their partnership as

they looked to combine agricultural knowledge and digital connectivity to aid farmers. Less than a year later, the Kaset Go application was launched.

One of the most interesting aspects of the mobile app was the fact it was not branded by either dtac or Yara. Ultimately, the partners wanted the focus to be on Kaset Go and not their respective companies.

"Autonomy is very important. It is not always easy for large companies to take a neutral, hands-off approach," Mr Saint-Andre reported. "The product isn't about us, and we don't want it to be focused on us. That is why we didn't brand it. The concept needed to be validated by users and shown to everyone that it can work."

Moving Farming Forward

It is estimated that more than 10 million farmers in Thailand have access to smartphones. Despite the easy access to information this brings, nearly 13 million Thai farmers are still primarily reliant on their own knowledge which leads to a number of problems including reduced productivity, inefficiency and low profitability.

In a bid to reduce or eliminate those challenges, the Kaset Go application looks to supplement information through the creation of a digital community that focuses on three areas.

The first is curated knowledge from experts where they answer questions from farmers. Second, there is an information exchange where farmers can discuss similar experiences with their peers. And the final area is the publication of easily digestible academic content based on crop calendars and trends along with other key data, such as crop prices and agricultural news. All of this can be tailored to user preferences in the app.

Having worked with the sector, both dtac and Yara knew the importance trust would have in the success of Kaset Go. Mr Saint-Andre noted that since farmers tend to trust one another, the app was built with a peer-to-peer concept in mind as this would allow it to empower farmers communities through voices they were already comfortable with.

Currently, Kaset Go is the fastest growing farmer app in Thailand and is helping accelerate the adoption of digital innovation across the industry. More than 500,000 farmers are registered and content in the application receives three million monthly views.

The next steps for moving farming forward through Kaset Go involves building up the community even further. This includes adding specialised information and teaming up with more experts to broaden the scope of knowledge available. Plans are in place to incorporate monetisation features, such as value-added services, into the app as well.

"We want to make this a profitable business. It is important to make it a profitable business. We want to show there is value in delivering new services to farmers. This may come from indirect revenues, such as advertising or data management, at first. There will be other opportunities moving forward. The goal is to test everything and see what works," Mr Saint-Andre concludes. ■



PHOTO: TELNOR GROUP

In December 2000, Telenor announced that it had entered into an agreement to purchase a significant part of Thailand's Total Access Communication, or tac as it was known.

The Mobile Changemaker

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

After more than 20 years of growth, the organisation, now known as dtac, is on the cusp of another transformative partnership.

The Bencharongkul family had been in the communication business for two generations and built tac into the second largest mobile operator in Thailand during the 1990s. However, the country had been hit hard by the Asian financial crisis and the family was looking for an international partner who was ready to invest in new growth opportunities for the company.

The timing could not have been better for Telenor as the Norwegian telecom company had recently entered Bangladesh and Malaysia as part of an Asian expansion. These moves were based on a belief that mobile technology would become a mass market product beyond Europe.

"European 3G licences were getting expensive around this time. They were too costly for Telenor to compete for. A new growth strategy emerged, and in 1999 Telenor decided to establish a regional office in Singapore with a mandate to explore opportunities to invest in new markets in Asia," Telenor Group CEO, Mr Sigve Brekke, said. "One year after the office had opened, Telenor entered into partnerships and acquired significant

ownership stakes in Malaysia's Digi and what was then known as tac in Thailand."

When Telenor joined tac, the company was a traditional Thai business with complex formal and informal structures. One of Telenor's first tasks was to build a culture based on a Nordic leadership philosophy where the staff was empowered with greater responsibilities. That meant internal barriers preventing effective interaction had to be identified and removed.

Finding a balance between two different cultures was a priority for tac, and the company was managed by a pair of CEOs, one Thai and one Norwegian, for three years.

Another major challenge was company's less than stellar reputation in the market at the time. The quality and coverage of its mobile network had gradually deteriorated and there was a need to rebuild customer trust. A campaign was developed where Mr Brekke and Khun Vichai Bencharongkul, the organisation's two CEOs, fronted advertisements and took personal responsibility for improving tac's mobile network coverage and quality. It was the

first time Thai people saw the CEOs of a big company in a TV commercial. The results were positive and led to more ambitious campaigns.

"Creative marketing and a unique ability to understand customer needs were central to our growing popularity in Thailand. We even organised our own street campaigns. All 5,000 employees, from secretaries to technicians and engineers to accountants, were dispatched to join the mob marketing activities," Mr Brekke recalled.

As technology advanced and the analogue network was replaced by a digital one, tac was no longer a fitting identity. The company added a 'd' and became dtac, the name everyone is familiar with today.

Of course, fun marketing activities and a new name mean very little without substance. In order to support its goal to be one of the country's most popular and well-liked companies, dtac launched customer-friendly services and simple products that strengthened the firm's down-to-earth, humble and fun brand image. The foundation of the new brand, and what made dtac stand out from its competitors was a profound belief in humility and in going beyond what was required or expected.

"dtac led the market with fresh products and services. A key initiative was unlocking SIM cards so consumers could use handsets from any vendor. We also introduced one nationwide calling rate and were the first to launch user friendly prepaid price plans," Mr Brekke stated. "To remove bottlenecks in distribution that kept SIM cards and refills from reaching the market, we cut

through the traditional Thai wholesaling system and started selling directly to shops.”

Thailand matured faster than most Asian markets, and customers quickly switched from speech to data as the public could afford more advanced phones and better services. It became common to see people on the streets of Bangkok using their mobile phone. Its pervasiveness was evident when Telenor celebrated its 10-year anniversary in the Kingdom and announced the company's customer base had passed the 20 million mark.

Continued growth required a bigger space and dtac eventually moved into new surroundings at Chamchuri Square next to Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. The modern hub was inspired by Telenor's headquarter in Norway with open landscapes removing barriers; meeting rooms stimulating collaboration and creativity; and state-of-the-art connectivity allowing employees to work from anywhere in the building. Its offices and culture gained notoriety far beyond Thailand, and the company was ranked among the world's 10 best places to work. But this wasn't the company's only move.

Continued growth and new competition

Telenor moved its regional office from Singapore to Bangkok in 2006 as it sought to be located in a country where a local operation was present. In 2008, after six years as co-CEO and then CEO of dtac, Mr Brekke was appointed Executive Vice President and Head of Asia at Telenor Group.

The introduction of 3G, and later 4G networks, across the region, saw demand for access to mobile services increase rapidly each year with Asia becoming an increasingly important

territory for Telenor. The organisation's skill in creating and operating mobile networks combined with deep market understanding and a highly efficient team became a notable growth machine for Telenor. When Mr Jon Fredrik Baksaas resigned as Group President and CEO, Mr Brekke, who had been central in building the organisation's regional presence, was appointed as his successor.

This was during a time when the mobile market experienced its first sign of saturation. Customers' data consumption continued to double every year, but mobile operators were not able to capitalise on investments in licenses, new technology and services.

“In an increasingly digital world, the firms that captured growth were digital over-the-top (OTT) players who enjoyed global reach with minimal local investments. To be prepared for fierce competition from both existing and new brands, we initiated several programs to digitise and automate operations; become more efficient; and streamline the entire organisation. Dtac was one of the first telco's to introduce a multi-vendor virtualised network and development of a mobile app for retailers. These measures were demanding but necessary to secure long-term, sustainable operations in Thailand,” Mr Brekke detailed.

A new telecom-tech company

For more than 20 years, the mobile industry had been on a journey connecting people. From voice to message and data services, the mobile phone has been the most transformative technological innovation, according to Mr Brekke. He added that it has reduced inequalities by providing access to information, created markets for new business and provided an improved platform for efficient government services. However, this is

only the start.

“Today, the mobile industry is at the beginning of a digital shift, where new technologies, like high-speed networks (5G), artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT) and global data centres, come together in a perfect storm,” Mr Brekke said. “In the coming years, the traditional telecom industry will experience more changes than in its entire history combined. To be successful and capture new growth in this increasingly complex business environment, traditional mobile companies need to transform into telecom-tech companies.”

Telenor's success over the years has been driven in part by its ability to identify new opportunities early on. To be a leading force in a world that is moving beyond connectivity, the company began exploring partnerships that would help it build innovative products and services capable of enriching the lives of customers.

In November 2021, CP Group and Telenor announced they wanted to combine their mobile companies, True and dtac, to create a telecom-tech company and a leading provider of telecom services in Thailand. Following a successful due-diligence, True and dtac approved the merger in February 2022. The merger is currently awaiting regulatory and shareholder consent. The current operations of True and dtac will continue to operate independently until the transaction is completed, which is expected to be within 2022.

“A new telecom-tech company will continue to invest in digital infrastructure, drive service innovations, modernise society and contribute to the development of a thriving digital ecosystem in Thailand,” Mr Brekke explained. “dtac has played a significant role in supporting Thailand with connectivity for over 20 years, and Telenor remains committed to realise new digital opportunities for Thailand and Thai people as we enter the next leg of our journey in the country.” ■



PHOTO: TELENOR GROUP

Above Left: President and CEO of Telenor Group Mr Sigve Brekke and CP Group CEO and Chairman of the Board of True Corporation Mr Supachai Chearavanont at the signing ceremony in November 2021. Above: From 2002 when dtac CEO Mr Sigve Brekke and CEO of Telenor Group, Mr Jon Fredrik Baksaas campaigned for dtac in a local shopping centre.

Facts

- The Telenor Group is currently represented in 9 markets worldwide with Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Thailand being located in Asia
- Telenor Group had 182 million subscribers in 2020 of which 19 million were subscribers of dtac in Thailand
- The Group's revenue in 2020 was NOK 123 billion, of which NOK 24 billion were generated in Thailand
- dtac was established in 1989 and Telenor became a shareholder in 2001
- In 2021, CP Group and Telenor announced that they wanted to combine their mobile operations in Thailand

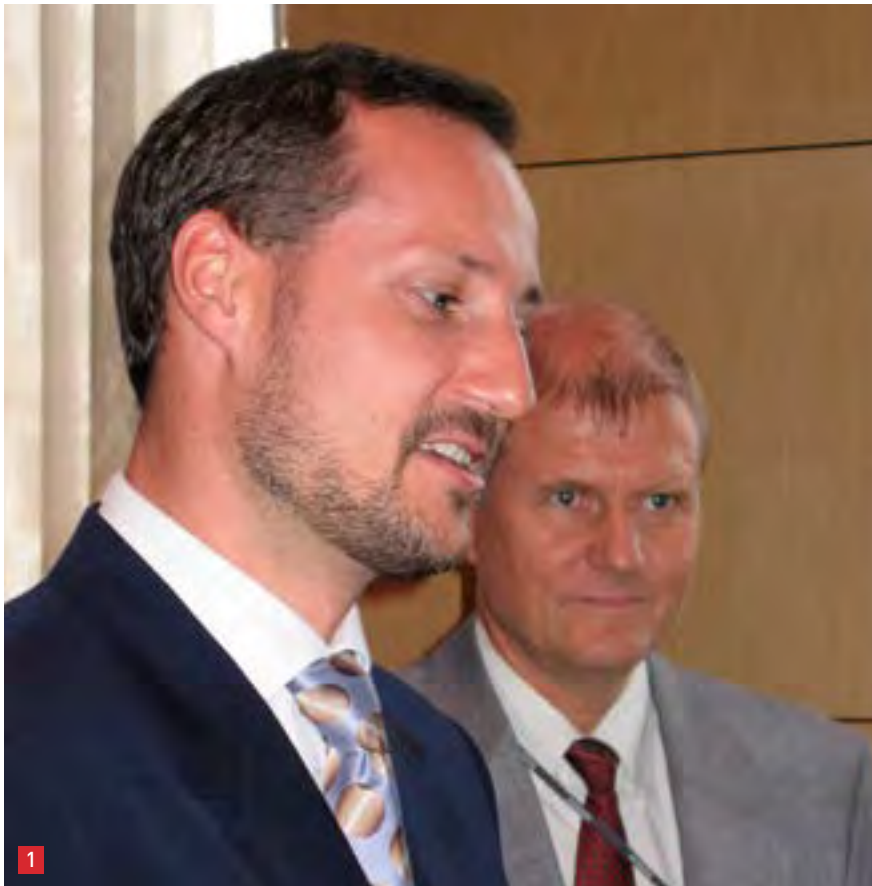
The Thai-Norwegian was formed in 1996 to mainly support Norwegian business interests in Thailand and to create venues for networking and exchange of ideas.

25 Years of Silver Memories

We have collected pictures from the last 17 years of the chamber's existence. Sadly most of the pictures from the first eight years from 1996 to 2004 are only available in paper format and of so poor quality that we have decided not to reproduce them here.



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1. HRH Crown Prince Haakon Magnus of Norway visited Thailand in November 2004. Here with ASTW Managing Director, Sverre Golten
2. Purely social activities are also part of TNCC's agenda; here from the Children's Christmas event in 2018
- 3-4. The Norwegian Business Centre where TNCC is co-located with Norway Connect was opened in 2009. A Buddhist blessing ceremony was held before the official opening by H.E. Ambassador Merete Fjeld Brattested
5. The first TNCC team was Executive Director Ingeborg Stenholt and Executive Secretary Sukanda Laopanich. Here from the first days in the new office
6. From 2020's Seafood under the Stars. Ambassador Kjersti Rødsmoen and NSC Regional Director Asbjørn Warvik Rørtveit with a happy team from Aker BioMarine
7. In November 2007, TNCC arranged a business seminar combined with a gala performance. Here renowned artists Einar Steen-Nøkleberg on piano and violist Arve Tellefsen with Ambassador Merete Fjeld Brattested
8. In 2014, TNCC hosted Norway-Asia Business Summit. Here with Sigve Brekke (Telenor), Finn Kristian Aamodt (Innovation Norway), Kristin Skogen Lund (NHO) and Egil Hogna (Yara)
9. The summit continued in Myanmar. A serious breakdown of the delegation's bus in Nay Pyi Taw, resulted in TNCC's Vibeke Lyssand Leirvåg taking things into her own hands by asking for a ride on a passing truck
10. The 2014 summit delegation visit to Myanmar included a visit to the parliament complex in Nay Pyi Taw
11. In preparation for the Thai-EFTA FTA negotiations, the Thai-EFTA Business Circle was launched in 2020. A joint reception was hosted by the Norwegian and Swiss ambassadors
12. Thailand's Joint Foreign Chamber of Commerce plays an important part of TNCC's activities. Here from the Prime Minister's Office luncheon in 2018. Ambassador Kjersti Rødsmoen and TNCC President Aina Eidsvik with JFCCT Chairman Stanley Kang other TNCC board members.

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PHOTO: JFCCT

There are opportunities in Thailand available to foreign investors even if taking advantage of these isn't always easy.

Open to Opportunities

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

According to Mr Stanley Kang, JFCCT Chairman, the country is moving in the right direction when it comes to eliminating paperwork and improve processes, but greater openness could be beneficial to everyone.

The Joint Foreign Chambers of Commerce in Thailand (JFCCT) is celebrating its 45th anniversary this year. As the umbrella body for various Thai-foreign chambers of commerce and business associations operating in the country, it has focused on promoting investment and trade while protecting rights throughout its history.

However, it has seen nothing quite like COVID-19 during that time. As the Kingdom charts a post-pandemic course aimed at stimulating the economy, the government seeks foreign investment to aid recovery efforts. Despite increasing competition from Vietnam and Indonesia in the region, the JFCCT still has confidence in Thailand.

"Thailand is in a good place. It's not necessarily behind other countries when it comes to attracting foreign investment. It just needs to promote its strengths and work towards improving other areas," JFCCT Chairman Mr Stanley Kang stated.

Efforts to eliminate paperwork

and improve processes have been sped up because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr Kang points to how quickly the Thai government switched from the Certificate of Entry system to Thailand Pass for overseas arrivals as an example of this speed in action.

"Things will be different as the country restarts and recovers. You are already seeing the move towards e-government and digital transformation happening faster. Long-term targets look more obtainable now," Mr Kang noted. "Ultimately, Thailand needs to be proactive and not reactive in supporting transformation."

Digital liberalisation and implementation will be vital to supporting both the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy model which are needed to drive Thailand 4.0.

"There is a clear vision for both the EEC and BCG, but more work needs to be done on removing obstacles so they can actually take shape. How fast and

how good they can be implemented will determine whether or not these are ultimately successful," Mr Kang reported. "You can't just talk about doing them. You have to get out of your comfort zone and take action."

Mr Kang believes openness is one of the most needed actions to reach the full potential of the Thailand 4.0 blueprint. A more open country would make it easier for foreign companies to access current opportunities and unlock new ones while elevating society as a whole.

"Quality of life and competitiveness are based on the openness of society. Silicon Valley is a good example of this. Thailand can become the hub of innovation and education in ASEAN if it works towards being more open," Mr Kang noted. "Foreign businesses are in Thailand to create, not take. Investors want to be in Thailand. Talent from around the world wants to be here as well. Openness will allow the country to make more friends who can work together to build and advance shared interests."

He adds being more open attracts foreign talent which will help build the domestic talent pool as people learn together.

"There remains a need to reskill and upskill in order for the country to have the necessary talent under the Thailand 4.0 economic model. One way Thailand can elevate education is by having the public and private sectors work together," Mr Kang proclaimed.

This would also allow that Kingdom to develop the service and tech service sectors, two areas Thailand must focus on in the view of Mr Kang. There is a need to attract more value-added businesses who will be able to advance EEC and BCG goals.

"Investors should note that there are many things coming up in Thailand. There are a lot of opportunities for overseas firms to assist in both the EEC and BCG, especially when it comes to digital transformation," Mr Kang said. "For businesses interested in this, they need to understand market trends and where they can fit into those."

Mr Kang would also like to see the Thai government do more to attract leading foreign companies to the country.

"Incentivising clusters helps, but some consideration needs to be given to bringing in the right players to Thailand. Their presence will create improvement while encouraging others to follow. This may require offering more favourable conditions and terms in addition to incentives," Mr Kang concluded. ■

Above: Mr Stanley Kang, JFCCT Chairman, believes Thailand is in a good place to attract foreign investment



PHOTO: JOTUN

As Jotun continued in its fight against fouling, the paint and coating manufacturer realised it needed to think bigger. In the end, product evolution wasn't going to be enough.

The Revhullution Is Now

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Jotun embraced what it has dubbed the Revhullution in order to help shipowners improve performance and sustainability.

Fouling has been a problem for seafarers from the moment boats hit the water. Various organisms attach themselves to the submerged parts of a vessel. This creates drag which slows ships down. Greek philosopher Plutarch was among the first to document the problem in 100 AD.

The issue has become more pressing in modern times due to ships operating on marine fuels as opposed to wind or manpower. The environmental impact of fouling is significant. According to research from IMO Glofouling Partnerships, a thin coating of 0.5-millimetre slime covering up to 50 percent of a hull surface can cause greenhouse gas emissions to increase by 20-25 percent.

Jotun has been a leader in antifouling technology with its paints and marine coatings. In 2011, the company launched Hull Performance

Solutions (HPS) which combined products, services and monitoring into a single offering to assist ship owners and operators more efficiently.

"Solving the age-old challenge of fouling is at the forefront of what we do. Following the success of our first solution, HPS, we began to realise that chemistry and coatings alone is not the only answer to this challenge. Augmenting coatings with modern disciplines like data analytics will be the way forward," Jotun Thailand Managing Director, Mr Shygil Moideen, says.

This would lead Jotun to develop Hull Skating Solutions (HSS) and usher in what it calls the Revhullution. The proactive cleaning approach is engineered to keep a ship's hull free of fouling at all times.

HSS features five elements including the company's latest innovation, the Jotun HullSkater. The

device looks and works a bit like a robotic vacuum. When a ship is docked or anchored, it can be deployed to conduct inspection and clean the hull whenever necessary. To accomplish this, the machine is equipped multiple cameras and soft brushes that remove fouling without damaging the coating.

"The HullSkater is similar to controlling a remote control car. It has steel wheels with magnets, so it stays connected to the hull at all times. It captures videos and photos which provide data on what type of fouling is occurring and proactively cleans," Mr Moideen states.

And while the HullSkater garners the most attention, it is part of the larger HSS which showcases Jotun's ability to combine data, knowledge and innovation into a single solution that benefits shipowners.

"The idea of HSS was conceived with the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach combining data analytics, advanced robotics and our experience in fouling management. We were also able to work with industry partners and experts, such as Kongsberg Maritime, to further our pursuit for the best solution," Mr Moideen explains. "HSS is a testament to how we think outside of the box and beyond the paint in the paint drum, to address the age-old challenge of fouling."

The technology behind HSS is

empowering ship operators with the ability to be proactive in the fight against fouling for the first time in history. Instead of waiting around for its effects to be felt, it is now possible to prevent them from happening, through the use of big data and our proprietary fouling risk algorithm.

"The essence of being proactive is to actively prevent or eliminate a problem before it happens," Mr Moideen points out. "The implication of being reactive is that you will already experience a problem, like an increase in fuel consumption, before you decide to act on it by engaging a diving company to conduct cleaning. This process takes time and planning, and you would have already been incurring the burden of paying for additional fuels during the interim."

He adds that isn't the only challenge when it comes to cleaning. There can also be issues trying to locate an available diving team. If one isn't free, shipowners are forced to incur more downtime. There are also risks in sending people into the water which need to be considered.

"Cleaning a hull is a tedious task that requires slow, physical work. We have replaced this with robotics. The process can now be done at anytime from anywhere. You are minimising safety risks while driving efficiency as well," Mr Moideen proclaims.

Revhullution Response

HSS has slowly been rolled out with the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting plans for a large-scale launch. At the local level, the company has begun presenting its newest innovation to firms in Thailand. Many were astounded to see Jotun going beyond paint and coatings.

"There is definitely a wow factor among the customers who have seen HSS in Thailand. They are used to paint

companies talking about chemistry. They are surprised when we start mentioning big data, analytics and algorithms," Mr Moideen reports. "Overall, the customer presentations have gone great, and the response has been overwhelming. No one has committed yet but there is a lot of interest."

While HSS left a positive impression on those who have seen demonstrations, legality was an area of concern among some shipowners and operators. According to Mr Moideen, Jotun is making progress in ensuring worldwide compliance.

"We are working very closely with port authorities globally on this, and we have gained approvals for skate operations in key ports and anchorages all over the world," Mr Moideen says. "We have active vessels with HSS and have proven that we are able to get approval from port authorities to conduct the hull skating operation."

Jotun's Revhullution is another milestone for the company in its longstanding quest to equip the shipping industry with better antifouling products. However, the unique scope and nature of HSS has made it an exciting development internally as well.

"In one way, this was new to us, and it was very exciting. On the other hand, we are always looking at ways we can support the shipping industry, and this is very much aligned with that goal," Mr Moideen says. "I am sure in the near future, you will hear of more new products and services to challenge the norm and further help in the industry's decarbonisation effort."

Sustainability Now

A desire to assist the shipping industry in reducing greenhouse gas emissions is simply one instance of Jotun's far-reaching sustainability efforts. In 2011, it launched Jotun GreenSteps,

a programme aiming to improve environmental performance across the board.

The company is not afraid to make difficult decisions to reach environmental goals. For example, it phased out lead chromates from all paint and coatings globally in 2014 despite the fact these products were selling well at the time.

"Sustainability is in Jotun's DNA. We have always been bold in making environmental decisions that are responsible. We want to provide the right solution. One of our challenges is to educate customers on this. We are seeing more and more firms in the marine industry thinking about sustainability," Mr Moideen points out.

He continues, "Jotun has a clear strategy when it comes to sustainability that covers our products and operations. When we are searching for new innovations, we are always looking at taking our GreenSteps. One question we are constantly asking ourselves is 'is this more environmentally friendly than our existing products?' We only progress if the answer to that question is yes."

These efforts can prove to be more challenging in a country like Thailand where cost is still driving most business decisions. Mr Moideen is optimistic that the tide is turning, however, with more companies in the Kingdom now aware of their environmental responsibilities.

"In Thailand, the environment and sustainability are becoming priorities, but cost-efficient products are still more in demand. This is changing and more companies in the country are emphasising the use of environmentally friendly products," Mr Moideen concludes. "You are seeing local authorities taking this seriously as well. Overall, things are moving in the right direction and adoption of sustainable practices will continue to increase." ■



Above Left: The Jotun HullSkater can conduct hull inspections and cleaning anytime a ship is docked or anchored. Above: Hull Skating Solutions allows ship operators to be proactive in the fight against fouling

Facts

- Jotun launched its Hull Skating Solutions through the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach combining data analytics, advanced robotics and coatings experience in proactive fouling management
- Fouling is what occurs when organisms attach themselves to the submerged parts of a ship
- A thin coating of 0.5-millimetre slime covering up to 50 percent of a hull surface can cause greenhouse gas emissions to increase by 20-25 percent
- The Hull Skating Solutions features the Jotun HullSkater, a robotic device that monitors and proactively cleans the hull whenever necessary
- Jotun launched the Jotun GreenSteps in 2011 to improve and organise the company's sustainability efforts



PHOTO: FELICIA DESIGN

There are many opportunities for Norwegian companies and entrepreneurs in Thailand. Of course, taking advantage of these isn't as simple as showing up.

Golden Opportunities

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

For fine jewellery manufacturer Felicia Design, it required resiliency, a willingness to adapt, staying positive and getting involved with local organisations.

Last year saw Felicia Design celebrate its 25th anniversary. The silver celebration was a joyous time for the company. It also provided Founder and Managing Director Ms Vibeke Lyssand Leirvåg with a chance to look back at the journey required to reach this milestone.

"I am proud to have reached our 25th anniversary. But you can't reach this milestone on your own. My team has had an important role and we couldn't have done it without their commitment and dedication," Ms Leirvåg says. "We must thank our customers who we have built relationships and partnerships with over the years as well."

The company has also faced its fair share of challenges during the past 25 years with the most recent being the COVID-19 pandemic. Overcoming these obstacles was vital to Felicia Design not only surviving but finding success.

"Being an entrepreneur and having

made it to our silver anniversary, it is in our DNA to be resilient. Felicia Design has survived every crisis," Ms Leirvåg explains. "To succeed, one needs to face these challenges and be reactive. Being reactive has been very important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Decisions must be made fast and taking calculated risks is part of that."

She adds that navigating challenges in Thailand was not done alone. Local organisations, such as the Thai-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce, have been a valuable source of knowledge and information for the company.

"I've been involved with the Thai-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce since 1996. It has proved to be a vital resource over the years. The organisation provided me with opportunities to get advice from larger corporations when I couldn't afford to have an HR department to do the research for me," Ms Leirvåg notes.

"I have always been able to receive help when I needed it. This is particularly valuable in a country where the language and policies are quite different from Norway."

In addition to being resilient, there are other characteristics that are needed to make it. Having the right mindset will help, especially for entrepreneurs and SMEs who aren't likely to have massive backing.

"When you're an entrepreneur, you need to stay positive and keep that mindset. You have to understand that you never fail because there is always something to be learned from your experiences," Ms Leirvåg points out. "SMEs shouldn't be too proud, either. It is okay to ask people for help or advice."

Ethical and Sustainable Development

In recent times, Felicia Design has looked for opportunities to pursue ethical and sustainable development, even becoming a member of the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC). While it can be easy for smaller companies to think its efforts won't contribute to change, Ms Leirvåg believes all action is positive.

"Many SMEs fall into the trap of thinking their actions can't make a difference. That's not true. Small steps do make a difference," she explains. "For SMEs, it is sometimes difficult to embrace sustainable production because

of that mindset. For us, we didn't want to simply talk the talk, but we needed to walk the walk."

In this case, walking the walk meant applying for membership with RJC, the world's leading standard-setting organisation for the jewellery and watch industry. Founded in 2005, it focuses on achieving the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals by emphasising business ethics and responsible supply chains.

"Joining a bigger organisation, like RJC, shows we are committed to sustainable production. Their global standards of sustainable production are goals we want to work towards even if we can't accomplish them all today. Being a part of the RJC family means we belong to a large partnership and together we will build a sustainable future for our industry," Ms Leirvåg states.

She continues, "Today, we know we can't produce jewellery made from 100 percent recycled materials and responsibly sourced gems. It's just not feasible. But we can do as much as possible to get there. This also includes future plans to incorporate more sustainable efforts into our operations, such as using solar power, to make it greener and find ways to reduce the use of plastic in our operation."

As a Norwegian company, Felicia Design has always held Norwegian values when it comes to both sustainability and ethics. Being in Thailand means the latter can be difficult. However, the jewellery manufacturer didn't let that deter it from taking action. It recently joined the Thailand Private Sector Collective Action Against Corruption (CAC), a leading platform fighting graft in the country.

"We joined the Thai CAC to demonstrate to our clients and the world

that it is possible to operate a business in a transparent and clean manner. Joining also improves foreign perceptions of this country and shows our staff that we practice what we preach," Ms Leirvåg says. "We have been able to reinforce the anti-corruption message to our employees as many of them attended Thai CAC training courses and learned the CAC principles. The tailored CAC training helped our staff have a better understanding of the reasons behind some of our policies."

While Felicia Design has always been committed to anti-corruption, it wasn't able to join the Thai CAC until the organisation launched a certification for SMEs. The benefits have been far reaching for the company.

"Engagement with the Thai CAC helps to strengthen policies and internal controls specifically in Thailand, providing assurance that Thai management and staff have been trained and are taking ownership in the fight against corruption," Ms Leirvåg details. "Through the CAC SME program, we feel like we have a voice and can make a difference."

From Silver to Gold

Felicia Design may have only recently celebrated its silver anniversary, but the company is looking towards the future and, eventually, a golden anniversary. Up next for the firm is its move to new facilities and bringing all production in-house.

"We are moving from a 1,500 square metre facility to a 6,000 square metre one. This gives us more space and ensures we can now do everything in-house and give us the opportunity for growth," Ms Leirvåg reports. "The move provides us with opportunities to further improve our OEM services, branch into

new innovative ways of production, build a new luxury manufacturing section and be true to our slogan 'Emotion through Innovation.'"

Adaptability has been important for the company on its journey. The focus of Felicia Design has changed since starting operations 25-years ago as the manufacturer has learned more about what it does best.

"Our company has had a lot of chapters over the years. Since 2015, we have been 100 percent focused on being an original equipment manufacturer (OEM). This was done so the company could focus on what it was best at," Ms Leirvåg states. "That has presented us with new challenges as well. Most notably, being able to produce the same manmade piece repeatedly."

Having new facilities and additional space allows Felicia Design to solve that challenge. There is also an opportunity to further its training capabilities, including further development and improvement of practical goldsmith skills for employees, digital skills and offering language courses.

"Giving back is something we are committed to doing. We are setting up a training centre to upskill and reskill employees. It is important to add value to the employee experience," Ms Leirvåg explains. "Giving back to society through education is another area we have and will continue to invest in. For example, we are working with the Joint Foreign Chambers of Commerce in Thailand and its Education & Skill Committee on a pilot project that focuses on teaching STEM science to children through practical experiments."

From a market standpoint, Ms Leirvåg admits the jewellery industry is changing, and this will likely shape the company's future.

"Consumer habits are evolving. It used to be that a person would buy jewellery for someone as a gift. This usually meant the person purchasing it was focused on the size of the gem or the materials. Now, people buy jewellery for themselves and care more about design. We must be able to respond to this trend," Ms Leirvåg concludes. ■



PHOTO: FELICIA DESIGN

Above Left: Traditional Norwegian "Rosemaling" inspired pendant and earrings are part of Felicia Design's collection. Above: Felicia Design's Managing Director, Ms Vibeke Lyssand Leirvåg

Facts

- Felicia Design celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2021
- The company is a member of the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC) and the Thailand Private Sector Collective Action against Corruption (CAC)
- Felicia Design is currently moving into a new 6,000 square metre facility
- In 2015, the company began focusing entirely on being an original equipment manufacturer of jewellery



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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Foreign business owners and employees are aware of the work permit and visa challenges that currently exist in Thailand.

A Never-Ending Challenge

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

There is hope some of these pain points can be lessened as the government looks to implement digitalisation and aims to become more attractive to overseas businesses..

The process of bringing foreign employees to Thailand has remained largely unchanged for almost 50 years. This has caused an untold number of headaches for businesses over that time and is now hampering the government's own Thailand 4.0 vision and its aims to encourage more investment from overseas.

Despite the pressing need for change, little attention has been paid to the cumbersome work permit and visa processes. According to Mr Bob Fox, Regional Director at a trade and investment consultancy, these are also hampered by inconsistency and a lack of harmony between the Thailand Immigration Bureau and the Department of Employment in the Ministry of Labour.

"There is a need to change the mindset in some areas. The siloed approach creates too many conflicting interests," Mr Fox states. "All good digital governments have an accepted level of truth relying on user-stated facts and then place heavy penalties on false statements. Thailand doesn't have this approach. You have to prove every last detail to multiple government agencies."

The required burden of proof puts a strain on businesses operating in Thailand, noticeably SMEs who must invest their limited resources on obtaining and maintaining work permits and visas.

"It takes our human resources staff two days to prepare the required visa and work permit documents for each of our foreign staff," Felicia Design Managing Director Ms Vibeke Lyssand Leirvåg notes. "Most of the paperwork is either redundant or has been submitted previously and has remained unchanged. All of it must be delivered in person as well. That isn't really acceptable."

Another issue Ms Leirvåg and foreign-owned SMEs face is bringing in skilled foreign workers for training or other short-term projects. A desire to reskill or upskill local staff is made difficult due to rigid regulations and a lack of clarity when it comes to issuing temporary visas and work permits to this group.

Situations like these, as well as other grey areas, make compliance very challenging, especially for SMEs.

"Reforming laws that could result in legal avoidance must be looked at. In

some cases, there are contradictory laws," Ms Leirvåg says.

Starts and Stops

The SMART Visa system was a step in the right direction when it came to solving some of Thailand's work permit and visa issues. Launched by the Thailand Board of Investment (BOI) in 2018, the program looked to attract highly skilled manpower and investors in the country's thirteen targeted industries.

However, take up of the SMART Visa since it was first launched three years ago remains limited due to cumbersome requirements. Only about 1,000 visas have been issued, but nearly 20 percent of that total went to spouses and children of visa holders, according to statistics.

The newly proposed Long Term Residents (LTR) scheme plans to attract a large number of wealthy foreigners in four categories and is expected to benefit to the economy. However, it is for targeted groups who meet wealth and/or income requirements and does not address the ongoing issues many business owners face.

"Without fundamental reform, the economy will struggle to build skills and attract talent needed to support business growth, let alone support higher-vision objectives such as Thailand 4.0," Mr Fox says.

Another effort that started out with promise but has since hit a few bumps in the road is the Regulatory Guillotine in Thailand. Formed in 2017, there was a belief this body could make progress on key ease of doing business issues, including improvement of work permit and visa processes in the space of a



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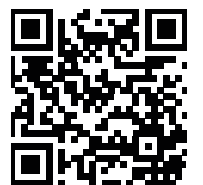




PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

shareholders' meetings digitally with no more limits on the physical location of attendees.

"It is an elegant solution but the technology requirements brought in later are cumbersome," he says.

Next up could be addressing the many redundancies and superfluous items required under the current work permit and visa process.

"One first step would be to change 90-day reporting to reporting a change of address only, or reduce it to once per year. The medical certificate needed for a skilled work permit and the redundant paperwork required for foreign staff. Another example which the COVID-19 situation highlights is having to leave the country in many cases to apply for a Non-Immigrant B or business visa. There are a number of things everyone agrees need to be reformed," Ms Leirvåg says.

She continues, "Beyond that, it is about identifying areas where minor adjustments would lead to noticeable benefits. One example of this is more flexible short-term work permits for skilled foreign workers. Transfer of knowhow is essential to Thailand's economy. Companies wanting to bring someone in from overseas to train or upskill staff are limited in their ability to this. A small improvement to this system could have a positive effect when it comes to developing Thailand's workforce." ■

Above: Despite the pandemic, physical visits are still required for some procedures with Thailand's Immigration Bureau.

"In 2019, the Thai Regulatory Guillotine identified 1,094 recommended changes that were ready to implement. For various reasons, progress stalled. A re-start occurred in September 2020 with the establishment of a Fast Track Regulatory Reform Committee and nine subcommittees," Mr Fox reports.

Both Mr Fox and Ms Leirvåg point out there is a lot of support for change to the work permit and visa process in Thailand. Organisations, such as the BOI, Office of the Public Sector Development Commission, Joint Foreign Chambers of Commerce in Thailand (JFCCT) are also pushing for reform. But it is a complex issue that requires buy-in from multiple agencies.

Some progress has been made on the digitalisation front, such as online filings being now accepted by the Ministry of Finance and the online BOI application process. The BOI, in particular, has been proactive in making life easier for foreign firms operating in Thailand.

Wasted Opportunities

Ongoing work permit and visa challenges results in Thailand means the country is not capitalising on the advantage it has over others in the region.

"Thailand has a natural advantage as the geographical centre of Southeast Asia that can be developed and used to national advantage for goods and manufacturing. But in the digital world, the winner will be the economy with the most efficient, resilient and innovative digital economy and digital services, and which embraces the services sectors," Mr Fox explains. "This means digitalised government and all processes normally

done digitally, not as an exception. Thailand is not there yet."

While large businesses in more traditional sectors may be willing to deal with cumbersome processes because of the country's strategic location, tech firms or other companies used to a certain level of digitalisation are more inclined to go elsewhere.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the startup space. Flash Group became the first Thai unicorn, a startup company with a value of USD1 billion or greater, in 2021 after a decade of trying. Singapore saw 10 firms reach unicorn status between January and October 2021 alone. One difference between the two countries is that Singapore has embraced the digital economy and is providing the digital services these businesses need to survive and thrive.

"Thailand should be a hub for startups, but 80 percent of these are in Singapore. Thailand has so much raw creativity. This needs to be turned into something and commercialised," he explained.

Small Steps

Attracting startups and encouraging more foreign investment starts with making it easier to operate in Thailand. While larger, more fundamental changes seem unlikely in the short term, there are opportunities for small victories that can eliminate known pain points.

Mr Fox cites the passing of the Royal Decree on Teleconferences through Electronic Means B.E. 2563 as one such victory. This new law, which passed in response to lockdowns brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, makes it possible to legally convene board and

Facts

■ JFCCT has published a report on duplications under the current work permit and visa process with three remedies: CUT/COMBINE/EASY-ON-LINE.

■ The BOI launched a SMART Visa system in 2018 that targeted 13 industries

■ Only about 1,000 SMART Visas have been issued since the program first launched

■ A new Long Term Resident scheme may bring economic benefits

■ The LTR scheme and SMART Visa program only address a few of the ongoing visa and work permit issues for the business community

■ In 2019, the Regulatory Guillotine identified 1,094 recommended changes, ready to implement

■ Fast Track Reform, including the Regulatory Guillotine, re-formed from September 2020

■ The Electronic Meetings Decree permits board and shareholders' meetings to be conducted digitally



Demand for Norwegian salmon in Thailand continues to grow with more than 20,000 tons imported from Norway in 2021.

Salmon's Here to Stay

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

The Norwegian Seafood Council believes this is just the tip of the iceberg with new products and sales channels along with rising brand awareness expected to reel in more consumers.

Norwegian salmon is now pervasive throughout Thailand. Central Food Hall and Tops Supermarket, two of the country's leading supermarkets, carry it while countless Japanese restaurants, including ZEN and Sushi Den, proudly boast of using salmon from Norway.

"Thailand is a highly interesting and trendy market. Consumers really love Norwegian salmon due to its versatility. It can be used for both Western and Asian dishes, including Thai ones," Mr Asbjørn Warvik Rørtveit, Norwegian Seafood Council (NSC) Director, South-East Asia, says. "The demand for high-quality food products in which a country of origin serves as a source of trust has pushed Norwegian salmon to become the top-of-mind food choice for Thai consumers. This is on top of its already high popularity in the market due to the high density of Japanese restaurants in urban areas."

A love of Norwegian salmon has created a surge of demand in the Kingdom. According to NSC, exports rose by 43 percent in volume this year when compared to 2020 and are up by 29 percent when compared to 2019, the most

recent pre-COVID-19 year.

"Demand for Norwegian salmon is driven by increases in both home-cooking and ready-to-eat meal consumption as the public has placed greater emphasis on their health and food safety during the pandemic and convenience during the lockdown," Mr Rørtveit notes. "Thai consumers are becoming more health-conscious while also keeping up with the trend when it comes to food. Norwegian salmon is the perfect product for Thailand because it is trendy yet healthy."

Based on the import numbers, Mr Rørtveit estimates that salmon consumption among Thai consumers has increased by 10-15 percent in 2021. Obviously, this did not happen by accident. NSC has been active in both educating the market and making it easier for people to find goods. In both cases, the key was to find strong partners who help the Council connect with a local audience.

"NSC's strategy is to establish relationships in the local market. Over the years, we have had successful campaigns with our retail partners, including Thammachart Seafood and

Central Food Retail, as well as major Japanese restaurants, such as ZEN and Sushi Den," Mr Rørtveit reports. "We are also working with quick-commerce platforms like Grab and LINE Man."

Additionally, NSC has extended education efforts to the grassroots level where influencers and other media help spread the word about Norwegian salmon and various seafood products.

"We have partnered with social influencers such as Bon Jakobsen and Bebe Fit Routine as well as media outlets such as The Cloud," Mr Rørtveit states. "Recently, we focused on educating consumers on how to cook Norwegian seafood at home by partnering with popular shows, including The Big Kitchen and, Pholfoodmafia and community page - Japan With Us. These pieces featuring Norwegian salmon, fjord trout and Norwegian saba provided consumers with ideas on how they could use Norwegian seafood in different kinds of dishes. One of the goals was to show the public how easy it is to cook at home."

The initiative took on greater importance because of COVID-19 restrictions which prevented people from dining out. As seen by the salmon consumption estimates, the results have been positive.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the home cooking and online trends, shifting the market landscape that was once heavily dependent upon dining out," Mr Rørtveit details. "Now Thai consumers have learned to cook more at home and integrate Norwegian seafood as a healthy food option."

This trend has been supported



PHOTO: NORWEGIAN SEAFOOD COUNCIL/THOMAS ENGSTROM

by a shift in marketing strategies from NSC. With more people cooking, it was important to have easy access to Norwegian salmon via platforms they were already familiar with.

"We have shifted our marketing strategies towards online touchpoints by tapping into joint promotional campaigns with Grab, LINE Man and other retailers who have strong online presence such as Central Food Retail and Thammachart Seafood," Mr Rørtveit explains. "We have also launched online advertisement to increase our exposure on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram."

Results have been impressive and should continue to grow moving forward. As Thailand moves out of lockdown and potentially welcomes tourists again,

demand is expected to rise in the coming months.

"Now that consumers are familiar with ordering seafood online, sales generated from both newly opened eateries and online channels will grow during the last quarter of 2021," Mr Rørtveit says. "If Thailand can reopen to tourists and travelers, this will help increase sales even further. Our research shows that up to 20 percent of consumption came from this group."

More Than Salmon

While Thailand's love of salmon shows no signs of abating, NSC believes this is only a start. The potential for Norwegian seafood exports to Thailand is great with opportunities available when it comes to both products already popular in the country and ones that may not yet be accessible.

"There is definitely more room for growth for salmon, fjord trout and saba exports to Thailand," Mr Rørtveit notes. "However, Norway has many seafood products to offer. What we have promoted in Thailand is just the tip of the iceberg. We aim to introduce new products to our potential retail and restaurant partners and get them to see the quality and the taste. Hopefully, this will create new demand among their customers."

NSC has also identified challenges that need to be overcome as it relates to public perceptions of certain fish. For example, saba is popular among Thai consumers although there is some confusion over where it originates from.

"Norwegian saba is a promising seafood product that we are trying to promote. It is used widely in Japanese restaurants and has gained more popularity because of its juicy taste and nutritious quality. However, our challenge is to establish Norway as a seafood nation and battle the perception that saba, and salmon are from Japan," Mr Rørtveit points out.

He continues, "Over the years, we have seen a rise in recognition of the 'Seafood from Norway' origin mark and Thai consumers are paying more attention to the source of the food they purchase."

One of the new seafood products NSC hopes to introduce in Thailand this year is shellfish. Norway's largest value growth during the first six months of 2021 came from crustacean product exports with June being the best month on record for Norwegian shellfish.

"We are planning to promote Norwegian shellfish this year targeting high-end restaurants in Bangkok. Norwegian shellfish hasn't established a steady presence in the market which makes it difficult for restaurants to import due to small orders," Mr Rørtveit says.

In 2019, NSC relocated its regional office from Singapore to Bangkok. Mr Rørtveit recalls the move as being significant. Not only did it reflect the council's confidence in the potential of the Thai market, but it allows for a better connection with local consumers.

"Thailand is a very exciting market that has grown rapidly and has become the most important export market for Norwegian seafood in Southeast Asia," Mr Rørtveit explains. "My mission is to teach Thai consumers, once and for all, that salmon comes from Norway. We will continue to work hard to have clear visibility in the market over the coming years."

Establishing Norway as the country of origin for seafood products is just one aspect of NSC's long-term goals in Thailand. Mr Rørtveit cites providing high-quality seafood and promoting sustainability in production as other important aims the council is working towards. ■



PHOTO: NORWEGIAN SEAFOOD COUNCIL

Above Left: Fresh Norwegian salmon is a must on the menu of the more than 1,500 Japanese restaurants in Bangkok. Above: Mr Asbjørn Warvik Rørtveit, Regional Director, South-East Asia for Norwegian Seafood Council presenting premium Norwegian salmon

Facts

- The Norwegian Seafood Council (NSC) is a public company owned by Norway's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries tasked with marketing Norwegian seafood abroad
- 20,100 tons of Norwegian salmon were imported to Thailand from Norway in 2021, of which 18,400 tons were fresh air flown products
- According to NSC estimates, salmon consumption among Thai consumers has increased by 10-15 percent in 2021
- NSC is partnering with Thai social influencers and media outlets to promote cooking Norwegian seafood at home
- Norwegian salmon is now available on quick-commerce platforms like Grab and LINE Man
- NSC hopes to introduce shellfish in Thailand this year and will focus this effort on high-end restaurants
- In 2019, NSC relocated its regional office from Singapore to Bangkok



PHOTO: THAMMACHART SEAFOOD

Thammachart Seafood has become the go to source for seafood in Thailand whether it be in supermarkets, upscale restaurants or at one of its own food and beverage establishments.

Seafood Reinvented

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

The key to success for the company has been a willingness to evolve with everything from products to processes having changed since launching in 2007.

From prawns to oysters and lobsters to squid, in addition to a huge variety of fish, Thammachart Seafood has built its reputation on offering high-quality seafood in the most convenient manner possible. Of all of its products, salmon has been the most in demand.

"One of the most important decisions we have made was selecting salmon as our hero product. It has kept customers engaged and inspired to this day," Mr Julian G. Davies, Thammachart Seafood Chief Executive Officer, explains. "It is also available all year round and consistent in terms of quality. This is extremely important. You always know you are getting a high-quality product whenever you order salmon."

Quality is something the company values very highly. That is why it only works with sustainable, well-managed fisheries and responsibly farmed aquaculture operations who can

guarantee it. This is an area where the salmon industry shines.

"The salmon industry has something few others industry have in that it is consolidated. The key players have the financing to invest in new technology which provides the customer with a better product," Mr Davies states.

Customers in Thailand seemingly can't get enough high-quality salmon and it remains the best-selling product at Thammachart Seafood. The company imports salmon from across the world, including Norway, with shoppers drawn to its combination of great taste and attractive price.

"Everyone is aware of the health benefits and the price point is perfect for Thailand," Ms Yeeran G. Davies, Thammachart Seafood Chief Marketing Officer, says. "One trend we are now seeing is people infusing salmon into new dishes or creations."

This flexibility is another reason salmon is firmly entrenched as Thammachart Seafood's hero product. It can be used in innovative new products, such as Salmon Wellington or salmon bacon, that are both healthy and delicious. The latter was even recognised at The International Innovation Awards in the Product Category.

Of course, there is much more to Thammachart Seafood than salmon. Ms Davies points out the company's goal to create healthy lifestyle communities through healthy eating which requires offering other well-known seafood products as well as introducing new ones to consumers.

"We have always wanted a diverse product mix on our counters. The challenge in Thailand is that people aren't going to buy what they aren't already familiar with, so we need to find ways to shine the spotlight on other products," Mr Davies adds.

Offering customers a wide range of products is only one part of the equation. It's also important that these are easily accessible and up to date with current trends.

"Our values are customer-centric. We are always looking at ways to develop new products that meet demands and needs. This can be making indulgent foods healthier to keep up with trends or providing side dishes and ingredients that make shopping easier," Ms Davies states. "The feedback we constantly hear

from customers is that they want more convenience. That is important for us to provide.”

This approach extends beyond its retail outlets. Thammachart Seafood owns the Dock and Lobster Lab food and beverage brands while managing Ocean Bar at Central Food Retail. More recently, it launched 80 below in Siam Paragon's Gourmet Market, an experience-driven establishment with live tanks and a micro-cannery.

There is also a food service operation which focuses on five-star hotels, Michelin starred restaurants and other premium clientele. Different ventures do have different needs but that doesn't change Thammachart Seafood's approach to the customer experience.

One-Stop Shop

Thammachart Seafood had been scaling up its digital efforts prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The company saw a dramatic increase in online sales when lockdowns were enacted in Thailand since customers knew the brand and had no issues with buying their products online.

“Our online operations were successful, but the pandemic really fast-tracked growth. We had to make sure the infrastructure was in place to support these efforts. It was also important to be adaptable to the situation,” Mr Davies points out.

With the country reopening and people going out more, the percentage of online sales has decreased as in-person transactions increase. And while it could be easy to see this as a competition, Thammachart Seafood views the situation as an opportunity to improve the customer experience.

“Ultimately, the online and offline

experience needs to be complimentary. These two areas are not competing with one another but actually working towards providing customers with a seamless experience,” Mr Davies says. “It is extremely important we utilise all of our resources to operate efficiently.”

Work is currently underway on creating a one-stop shop where the company's offline and online outlets come together to make life easier for anyone wanting quality seafood.

“We envision it as a complete customer experience where someone can purchase items from across our outlets. For instance, they could have something from Lobster Lab and the online store in the same cart. The goal is to make buying seafood as easy as possible,” Ms Davies explains. “Our focus is to make sure they aren't losing time or money on things like transportation and delivery. If the online and offline experiences are compatible, people can enjoy seafood whenever they wish, wherever they are.”

Seafood Story

Mr Davies originally came to Thailand over 20 years ago as part of a PhD program on microorganisms. While originally schedule to last six months, the experience turned out to be more than he had bargained for.

“I spent six months on a shrimp farm which was an entirely new experience for me. I was really thrown into the deep end. At the end of the program, the company's managing director offered me a job. It ended up being an easy decision to stay,” Mr Davies recalls.

Eventually, he would buy out the company and take it under his wing. As the operation grew, Mr and Ms Davies were approached by what was then known as Carrefour in Thailand about

selling shrimp directly to customers. It was the challenge they were looking for and led to them developing a contract farming system.

The success of that endeavour caught the eye of The Mall Group, who approached the couple about taking over a seafood counter inside Emporium shopping mall with a second outlet opening in Central Chidlom Food Hall shortly thereafter. They decided to dive into the venture and Thammachart Seafood was born in 2007.

“We accepted the challenge and believed it was something we could do based on our previous experience. We knew the best way to experience seafood is from farm to counter and it meant we could ensure a great product,” Ms Davies explains. “We also did a customer survey before taking over so we could have a better idea of what people wanted. One of the most common responses was that they wanted fish fillets and not whole fish. That is where we began.”

Over time, they took over more seafood counters in stores across the country and now oversee more than 180 outlets. Their strategy has benefited all parties involved.

“We took a headache away from retailers who find managing seafood to be a challenge. Customers benefit because they can enjoy fresh, quality seafood,” Mr Davies notes. “And for us, having our staff at the counters is really beneficial. They are our eyes and ears and provide vital information which helps us make better decisions.”

The next chapter of the Thammachart Seafood story will involve continued expansion. In 2018, Thai Union Group acquired a stake in the company and with COVID-19 subsiding, it is now exploring new opportunities.

“Our focus is local, but we are also looking regionally. COVID-19 set us back a bit, but by the first quarter of 2022, we will start looking at regional expansion,” Mr Davies says. “Our main objective is to first push the brand into the regional markets as we have a lot of products, some of which are already drawing interest. There is the opportunity to replicate some of our other ventures, such as food and beverage outlets, as well.” ■



PHOTO: THAMMACHART SEAFOOD

Above Left: Thammachart Seafood oversees more than 180 seafood retail counters across Thailand. Above: Mr Julian G. Davies, Thammachart Seafood CEO, and CMO Ms Yeeran G. Davies launched the company in 2007

Facts

- Thammachart Seafood began operations in 2007
- The company oversees more than 180 seafood retail counters in Thailand
- Thammachart Seafood owns the Dock and Lobster Lab food and beverage brands
- Nearly 90 percent of the company's salmon imports come from Norway
- In 2018, Thai Union Group acquired a stake in Thammachart Seafood



PHOTO: AKER BIOMARINE

Antarctic krill may only be six centimetres in length, but Aker BioMarine believe they are the small solution needed for big challenges in the aquaculture, nutraceutical and animal feed.

Big Challenge, Small Solution

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Bigger isn't always better. Look no further than Antarctic krill for proof. The crustaceans are roughly the size of a paperclip but contain several health benefits that can do everything from improving aquaculture efficiency to helping people live healthier.

For Aker BioMarine, the key is sharing these benefits with the world in a sustainable manner. Despite Antarctic krill being among the most abundant marine biomasses on the planet, the company has been extremely diligent in maintaining the ecosystem, including harvesting well below quota limits.

"Since day one, we have been dedicated to improving human and planetary health, and many years later, our business continues to grow because we take care of the ecosystem we harvest in," Mr Chaiyot Rawekchom, Aker BioMarine Sales Director Southeast Asia, proclaims. "Our daily responsibility is to improve people's health without compromising the health of our planet and its oceans."

These aren't simply empty words or part of a marketing campaign. Aker BioMarine has actively pursued sustainability even before deploying

its first midwater trawl in the Southern Ocean. Mr Chaiyot points to a dialogue the company had with WWF-Norway before fishing as an example of just how far it goes to ensure operations have a low impact on the Antarctic ecosystem.

"We own and operate our entire value chain from catch to product, so traceability and transparency are imperative to our business. Our integrity and standards are helping to raise the bar in the industry," Mr Chaiyot states. "Harvesting of Antarctic krill is closely managed, monitored, and regulated. In fact, we have independent observers stationed onboard our krill harvesting vessels in Antarctic waters. The observers provide transparent and detailed reporting of catch volumes and vessel positions to the relevant authorities."

Two years ago, Aker BioMarine worked in close collaboration with leading industry and science figures to

carry out a multinational large-scale biomass survey. Those results established the size of the biomass which ensured accurate allowable krill catch limits. Currently, less than one percent of the stock biomass can be fished with more than 99 percent set aside for krill feeding predators. This is one of many guardrails put in place.

"It's important to share that we harvest well below the quota limits. In fact, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) uses a precautionary, ecosystem-based approach designed to prevent krill harvesting that will have a negative impact on a harvested species or other species in the ecosystem," Mr Chaiyot says. "All of our catches are reported to CCAMLR and harvesting is restricted to a specific region of the Southern Ocean called Area 48. The management of the fishery is robust as the consensus of 25 governments is needed to change any of the fishery regulations in the Antarctic."

These sustainability efforts have been recognised by leading agencies. Aker BioMarine's Antarctic krill fishery received an "A" rating for its well-managed fishery from the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) along with its third consecutive certification with no conditions from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) in 2020.

Additionally, Aker BioMarine has signed off on eight sustainability commitments that it will achieve by 2030. These include reducing its carbon intensity per ton of krill produced by 50

percent from 2020 levels, ensuring full circularity on all of its principal waste streams and decarbonising aqua and animal feed by delivering low-carbon marine ingredients.

"Sustainability is an evolving and growing topic among consumers and businesses today, and as the global demand for environmentally friendly products continues to rise, sustainability should remain core to any business. At Aker BioMarine, we believe that this is the only way to create long-term value," Mr Chaiyot states.

The Small Solution

The QRILL Aqua product range from Aker BioMarine can be beneficial to the aquaculture industry as it can reduce expenses and enhance growth. This, along with the aforementioned sustainable approach, makes it a possible solution to the obstacles farmers currently face.

"Krill offers a 'small' solution to a big challenge. Krill meal has a rich protein and amino acid nutritional profile, on par with that of fish. It includes high levels of long-chain fatty acids, feed attractants and astaxanthin, which stimulate fish feeding behaviour. Krill meal is, therefore, a powerful supplement to low fishmeal diets," Mr Chaiyot notes.

He continues, "Aside from enhancing fish growth and performance, krill meal supplementation has several proven benefits for aquaculture as it also promotes hepatic health. The amino acid composition of krill protein is very similar to that of fishmeal. This generally results in increased feed intake, as reported in different studies documenting a stimulatory effect of different krill products on the appetite of several fish species."

Krill meal has been in use for more than a decade and has proven to be successful when it comes to farmed fish and shrimp around the world, including those earmarked for export. Using QRILL Aqua, for example, is helpful in meeting international standards.

"Krill helps benefit optimal growth and survival in farmed fish and shrimp. It also aids in the prevention of skeletal deformities and helps with stress resistance. Other associated cost benefits are possible by using QRILL Aqua instead of other feed options," Mr Chaiyot details.

The interest for krill-based ingredients for nutraceutical and animal feed applications has increased steadily in recent years. Studies have focused on the better understanding of health and growth performance benefits of the various nutrients of Antarctic krill (*Euphausia superba*) across different species including human, dog, chicken, rodent, fish and shrimp. Depending on the application and product used, benefits can be attributed to krill amino acids, long-chain omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids, phospholipids, choline, astaxanthin, chitin, nucleotides, minerals and vitamins. Clinical studies in humans have shown that krill oil can positively influence a wide range of health conditions and the dietary inclusion of krill meal increased feed efficiency, growth, fillet quality and health of farmed fish and crustaceans, as well as improved nutrient composition and myopathies in fillet of broiler chicken.

Potential of Southeast Asia

Aker BioMarine opened a regional office in Thailand in 2018 as it looked to serve the local market and Southeast Asia as a whole. With the aquaculture sector experiencing double-digit growth in recent years, the company saw a chance to make a positive impact.

"Southeast Asia has huge market potential with nearly 700 million people and a fast-growing GDP and technology sector. Agricultural and aquaculture are important industries in this market. For example, the shrimp market is very important in Southeast Asia as Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand are the main global major shrimp exporters with their entire value chain and support from their respective governments," Mr Chaiyot

reports. "With our main product, QRILL Aqua, farmers can improve aquaculture efficiency in a sustainable way. The main benefits to aquaculture are increasing the palatability of shrimp and fish feed as well as improving immune status, quality of meat and feed conversion ratio."

The company currently has active sales in Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan with these local efforts linking up with offices in Shanghai and Mumbai to provide a strong regional presence and customer support. With different markets having unique requirements, this approach allows Aker BioMarine to better understand the needs of each.

"Aker BioMarine is the global leader in the krill industry, however, we rely on the support of the local presence with our office and logistic hub and our people on the ground. The local support can help us better understand local customers' needs, allowing us to build up the relationships and business in Thailand. Once we know and understand what the customer is looking for, we can deliver the solutions and services to them properly," Mr Chaiyot says.

While Antarctic krill may be small in stature, they provide solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing the aquaculture industry in the region. For Aker BioMarine, the end goal isn't simply to sell a product, but to help them overcome those obstacles and ultimately be more successful.

"We are committed to innovation, which has been with the company from day one. It also drives our future for tomorrow. We are more than a supplier to our customers. We challenge the status quo and think outside of the box," Mr Chaiyot states. "We take pride in not only understanding our customer's needs but working with them to find success. Customer centricity is at our core and our goal is to help our customers in Thailand and Southeast Asia stand out in the marketplace by sharing our global product expertise and market insights." ■



PHOTO: AKER BIOMARINE

Above Left: Mr Chaiyot Rawekchom, Aker BioMarine's Sales Director Southeast Asia
Above: Antarctic Endurance is the world's very first purpose-built krill harvesting vessel

Facts

- In 2018, Aker BioMarine opened a regional office in Thailand
- Active sales are ongoing in Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan
- Aker BioMarine currently makes products for the aquaculture, nutraceutical and animal feed sectors
- The entire value chain, from catch to product, is owned and operated by the company
- Aker BioMarine was the first krill company to hold Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification
- The company announced eight sustainability commitments that it will achieve by 2030

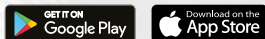
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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Thailand's desire to become the digital innovation hub of ASEAN was championed by the NDESC in 2021

Can Thailand Become ASEAN's Digital Hub?

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

This goal calls for the country to focus on digital transformation and elevate the digital economy.

If successful, these would boost Thailand's economy, improve social wellbeing and allow for sustainable development. However, the Kingdom is still some ways away from achieving those goals.

The good news is that the country does have some notable advantages. These include being the first ASEAN country to launch commercial 5G services and having some of the world's fastest fixed broadband internet. This has supported growth and advancements in certain digital sectors, such as e-commerce.

"Thailand is excelling in e-commerce and logistics and provides doorstep delivery of most types of products within very short timeframes and at very low delivery costs. This is something way better than in most European countries today," Mr Jostein Aksnes, Co-Founder and CEO of Thailand-based Seven Peaks Software, said.

On the other hand, more work is needed elsewhere. For instance, the public is comfortable with digital payment systems, but a lack of centralisation has created a new set of challenges.

"There are a lot of digital payment systems now in Thailand, but sadly no de-facto standard, so still no one way to pay for all services," Mr Aksnes explained. "That means multiple wallets and different forms of payment. Google Pay has not yet been launched in Thailand which would also help streamline payments."

For Thailand to become ASEAN's digital innovation hub, the country will need to solve that issue while incorporating digitalisation to eliminate other pain points for startups and SMEs. Mr Aksnes has experienced many of these firsthand during his time at Seven Peaks Software. Since being founded in 2014, the company has built up capabilities in software development, design and digital transformation consulting. Growth hasn't always been easy, and he cites a few places where business processes could be simplified.

Encouraging bank transfers and moving away from cheques; digitising data stored and shared by government agencies; and providing enhanced data for bank transactions and allowing for integration with accounting software are some possible improvement areas.

NDESC, short for National Digital Economy and Society Commission is a department under the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, Thailand (ONDE), has said it is currently creating a plan that would serve as a blueprint for revolutionising government operations, business practices and people's lifestyles. This is a step in the right direction.

However, it has been more than a year since NDESC stated this ambition and nothing concrete has been proposed. It has also been more than two years since then Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak told ONDE to come up with a plan covering the digital transformation of government services with little movement having been made on that front.

Talent and Advantages

While plans for Thailand to improve digitisation and become the digital innovation hub of ASEAN remain up in the air, another challenge has emerged in the form of talent. Competition here is fierce, especially in the technology sector.

"For Seven Peaks Software, talent is our core business, and we are investing a lot in building an employer brand to help and attract the best talent. We are, of course, still a small organisation in Thailand, and we are competing for talent with many major enterprises now that everyone is going digital and focusing on building tech capabilities," Mr Aksnes stated.

He continued, "The hiring market is getting more heated. At the moment, it's the talent's market, and companies are all fighting for the same talent."

Despite this, there are reasons to be optimistic. According to Mr Aksnes, access to talent in Thailand is increasing. In addition to this, companies like Seven Peaks enjoy good global hiring opportunities to bring in experts since the country is a very attractive location for expats to work.

Another advantage in Thailand's quest to become the digital innovation hub of ASEAN is the fact the cost of doing business and cost of living are cheaper in the Kingdom than in Singapore. The key will be building on those strengths by supporting startups, SMEs and the business community as a whole through increased digitisation.

"Allowing businesses to work digitally, by improving banking, payment and digitising document handling for the government would make the country more attractive to digital and technology startups and SMEs," Mr Aksnes said. "A lot has changed over the last eight years and today I would strongly recommend businesses to set up a digital business in Thailand instead of other countries in Southeast Asia." ■



PHOTO: SEVEN PEAKS SOFTWARE

When it comes to software development, businesses can focus too much on features. The issue with this is that it doesn't always solve specific pain points.

Adapting to Agile Software Development

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Seven Peaks Software's agile approach to software development sees them partner with companies to build products that provide real value.

Now in its eighth year of operations, Seven Peaks Software has built up capabilities in software development, design and digital transformation consulting among other areas. It has created solutions for numerous enterprises primarily in Scandinavia, and Thailand as well as clients throughout APAC.

One of the most unique aspects of the company is its desire to be a trusted technology partner as opposed to a vendor. For some clients, Seven Peaks Software needs to explain the differences in mindset or approach to software development.

Traditionally, an organisation wanting a new software application or to digitise certain processes, but without the in-house capabilities usually approach these projects with a very linear mindset.

They list their needs, vendors bid on a project, one is selected, the winner starts work and eventually it is handed over.

This makes sense in theory. But the reality often ends differently as businesses eye features as opposed to solving specific problems.

"One issue with a project approach or mindset is that you have a linear timeline and a focus on features, not solving specific pain points. The downside to this is time gets spent building things that may not be needed," Mr Jostein Aksnes, Co-Founder and CEO of Seven Peaks Software, says. "We firmly believe that it's a mistake to look at big software investments as one-time projects. In many cases, they should be considered product development where there are ongoing improvements taking place. This way the investment made

into building the solution will provide a much higher return of investment."

Moving from project development to a product development mindset can be challenging due to many aspects of a business.

"Too often in project development, clients think about how something is done. In reality, they should be thinking in terms of what. What is the problem they need to solve? What pain points are users facing? When those are answered, we can then look at the how," Mr Roy Ivar Moe, Seven Peaks Software Co-Founder and CTO, points out.

He continues, "When you develop a technology solution under the project mindset, there is no promise what is being built is good. You don't take the time to measure if it works. Instead, you always want to be scoping and deliver value in product increments. We need to be looking at the impact and effort of each feature and laying it out in a roadmap instead of just immediately trying to address a huge set of features in one big delivery".

Viewing Results

Seven Peaks Software supports clients with both traditional waterfall projects and modern agile software development projects. The company recommends the best approach based on the client's needs.

"Agile development allows you to set more frequent release milestones

which provide value to the client and users sooner. We can also start learning how the users interact with the software earlier in the process,” Mr Moe points out. “We are making incremental improvements that can be tracked and measured as things progress.”

To accomplish that goal, Seven Peaks works closely with its clients as a partner. Together, they define a roadmap that solves specific problem statements for specific users. This differs from taking a wish list from a client and working through it.

“If you develop using a roadmap, clients see value in what is being done. Not only that, but it ensures stakeholders gain a clear idea of what’s happening early in the process,” Mr Moe states.

Mr Aksnes adds the product mindset allows software to be developed in a much more valuable and cost-effective way. Time usually spent in the dark wondering what’s happening can now be used to make improvements.

“Attention and investment can be directed towards solving issues or making things better when you have a roadmap and visualised product,” Mr Aksnes says. “We also find that there tend to be non-essential items that slow down project development. Too many companies get caught up in things that aren’t essential or relevant when focused on an entire project.”

Testing and time aren’t aspects businesses always consider when starting a product. Using a traditional project approach where every last feature needs to be built from scratch takes months or years depending on size. Companies are then left playing catch up.

“Time to market is incredibly important when it comes to business. The more time you spend developing something, the more opportunities that have been lost,” Mr Aksnes explains. “You can save cost by clearly defining a

Minimum Viable Product (MVP) and focusing on getting that shipped with the key features first. Not just in terms of financial costs, but opportunity costs as well. At the end of the day, it is all about speed. The sooner you can validate your core concept, MVP or idea, the sooner you can start building out a more extensive product or solution.”

Both Mr Aksnes and Mr Moe admit that not all companies are comfortable or ready to work in a modern agile way. This can be due to company policies, procurement departments or just the lack of trust in paying for a service without knowing entirely what will be received.

To help mitigate risks and concerns, Seven Peaks provides free scoping workshops to advise clients on how projects could be split into multiple milestones and releases through a more agile approach.

“For businesses which do not yet have a clear overview of all their requirements, our free scoping workshop is a great starting point,” Mr Moe reports. “From there, we can take them through the next steps. Even if they are not able to proceed with that specific project, it shows potential clients our integrity, capability and mindset.”

Saying No

For a lot of companies, saying no to a potential client is incomprehensible. Seven Peaks sees it differently. The firm positions itself as a trusted technology partner which requires total honesty and a willingness to forgo short-term gain for long-term relationship building. Sometimes saying no leads to a better result than saying yes.

“You can’t say yes to everything. And we don’t want to say yes to everything. It is more beneficial to explain why a project is not viable as opposed to doing something we may not believe in,” Mr Aksnes notes. “Clients are paying us for

our expertise as a consultant. A good consultant is someone you can trust to do what’s right for your business.”

This is only half of the equation. From Seven Peaks’ perspective, the focus is on creating products that make a difference for clients. Pursuing win-win scenarios means the best possible results for all parties.

“From our side, we are passionate about building good products. We are passionate about making a difference. Saying no may close one door, but it can open another. The only reason we turn down a project is because we care,” Mr Aksnes says.

Mr Moe points out that Seven Peaks goes over why it can’t do something with most clients being understanding. He adds a lot of these companies appreciate the approach and even come back looking for opportunities to work together.

Of course, it was not always like this. Seven Peaks has been careful to balance its desire of becoming a trusted technology partner with creating a sustainable business.

“In the beginning, we were more opportunistic and chased many different types of business opportunities. During the last year, we have been more selective and focused on the type of projects and clients we take on,” Mr Aksnes explains. “A lot of companies are after a more modern approach to technology solutions even if they don’t always know exactly what that is. Working with us showed them a different way forward.”

As the company has matured and business has grown, Seven Peaks has come into a position where it works more with clients more as a partner than a vendor. This allows it to build long term relationships that benefits everyone.

“We have never wanted to be just another vendor. While that is how we started, we always aimed to be more than that. However, you need to gain the trust of the local market,” Mr Moe states. “Gradually, as you gain that trust, you evolve what you do. Taking on projects in the early days allowed us to sit down with clients and show them how our approach could benefit them.” ■



PHOTO: SEVEN PEAKS SOFTWARE

Above Left: Mr Roy Ivar Moe, Seven Peaks Software Co-Founder and CTO (left) Mr Jostein Aksnes, Co-Founder and CEO of Seven Peaks Software (right) launched the company in 2014. Above: Seven Peaks Software moved into a new office that is capable of supporting up to 100 employees in 2020

Facts

- Seven Peaks Software was established in 2014
- Services the firm offers include software development, design and digital transformation consulting
- Agile software development is an approach focused on launching a product and then making incremental improvements over time
- The company offers free scoping workshops to clients interested in learning more



PHOTO: JORDAN

Thailand may be known as the 'Land of Smiles' but more work is needed when it comes to oral care in the country.

Creating Sustainable Thai Smiles

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

Jordan wants to not only help support future generations of Thai smiles, but make sure it is done sustainably.

Jordan dental products have been available in Thailand since 1978. Back then, an individual importer had taken it upon his or herself to sell them in the country. Today, the Orkla-owned company has a presence throughout the Kingdom having focused on developing its brand and reach over the past few years.

"Jordan is currently available in well over 2,000 retail outlets in Thailand including Tops, Lotus's and numerous baby stores and dental clinics," Mr Bjorn Kruizenga, Asia Pacific General Manager at Jordan, states. "Additionally, the brand has expanded its online presence having opened official stores on Lazada and Shopee as we embrace e-commerce."

The way people are buying dental products isn't the only shift worth noting. The oral care industry continues to see strong growth which Mr Kruizenga attributes to three major trends.

"Firstly, there has been increasing

awareness when it comes to children's oral care. Second, adults are more aware of specialisation as it relates to dental health, including an aging population in Thailand that has its own unique oral care needs. Finally, there is a move towards more sustainable products that are good for you and good for the planet. We are monitoring and responding to all three trends," Mr Kruizenga explains.

As the largest oral care market in Southeast Asia, Jordan sees potential to grow in Thailand. According to Mr Kruizenga, the company is targeting a five percent share of the country's oral care market and will look to reach its goal through specialisation. This requires a different approach from the strategies its competitors are currently pursuing.

"Our focus isn't on quantity. We are looking to establish key focus areas. It is important to support the underserved segments of Thailand because this is where dental care is needed most," Mr

Kruizenga says. "Ultimately, the larger companies aren't really involved in these areas. For example, they don't develop child-focused dental care. Instead, they will adapt what they currently produce and market it to children."

Care for Kids

Early Childhood Caries (ECC), the presence of more than one decayed (cavitated or non cavitated lesions), missing (due to decay), or filled tooth, is extremely prevalent in Thailand. Research shows 53 percent of children three and under have at least one cavity with this number jumping to 76 percent by the age of five. Jordan wants to be a leader in the fight against ECC.

"We take children's oral care seriously. Education on the subject is vital. Our company organises campaigns with schools and tries to educate both kids and parents about the need for good dental care. We are also working with moms and social media influencers to promote this message," Mr Kruizenga details. "We're partnering with dentists in Thailand as well. Our goal is to help everyone understand just how important this is. Creating a better understanding starts with building awareness among all stakeholders."

In addition to this, there are some common misconceptions about childhood dental health care. For instance, many people may not know that children have different oral health needs from adults. Not only that, but each age group also has unique requirements.

Understanding that, Jordan develops products tailored exclusively to children based on their age.

"We put in the time and effort to understand the needs and challenges of the groups we serve. When it comes to children's dental care, we strive to develop products that are suitable for different age groups. Our goal is to make oral care both easy and fun," Mr Kruiuzenga points out.

Of course, having the best products is irrelevant if they can't get into the hands of children. To that end, the company continues to expand its reach.

"It is important for Jordan products to be widely available. One of our goals is to bring down the number of kids in Thailand with ECC issues," Mr Kruiuzenga notes. "People must have easy access to Jordan products. But they also need to know who we are and what makes us a leader when it comes to children's oral care."

Green Clean

The Jordan Green Clean line has earned acknowledgement for its sustainability. For example, Green Clean toothbrushes are made from 100 percent recycled plastic in the handle, bristles from bio-based materials and 100 percent recycled cardboard packaging.

Mr Kruiuzenga adds Green Clean is the company's ambassador sustainable range, but Jordan is introducing more sustainable improvements across the entire range of products.

"Sustainability is a top priority for us. We are part of the Orkla group which is the fourth most sustainable company in Norway. We have set internal targets aligned with the UN Global Sustainable

Development Goals, including making 100 percent of our packaging material either recycled or recyclable by 2025," Mr Kruiuzenga points out.

One of Jordan's biggest green milestones in 2021 was having replaced 110,000 kilograms of virgin plastics with recycled plastics. Mr Kruiuzenga puts this total into perspective by noting that's roughly the size of 22 African elephants. And while the figure is impressive, more work is needed to drive awareness of sustainability in Thailand.

"Another one of our aims is to become a leader in sustainable oral care in Thailand. This is actually more challenging than many people realise," Mr Kruiuzenga states. "There is a perception that sustainable products aren't as good, are more expensive or have other issues when compared to regular products. We must change this perception and that can only be done through awareness. All our latest sustainable oral care products are at least on par in terms of quality compared to regular benchmarks. Not only that, their impact on the environment is far less."

The company is seeing some positive momentum in this regard. Both younger buyers and some more progressive retailers already understand the need as well as the benefits and are gravitating towards more environmentally friendly products.

"Generation Z and Millennial buyers are aware of why they should use sustainable oral care products and are making the switch," Mr Kruiuzenga reports. "Additionally, retailers across Thailand are seriously looking at sustainable oral care products as demand shifts and they must meet their own

sustainability targets."

More work is needed, however. While dental care companies either ignore sustainable oral care products or rely on gimmicks, Jordan's approach to sustainability is contributing to a circular economy by reusing what already has been created to lessen the burden on waste.

The company's focus is on recycled, recyclable, re-use, waterless and renewable materials as opposed to creating new products from virgin natural materials. That is why Jordan did not introduce a new range of bamboo toothbrushes.

"We are utilising multiple methods to build awareness for sustainable oral care in Thailand. These efforts include engaging thought leaders, partnering with influencers and launching new initiatives to increase knowledge," Mr Kruiuzenga says. "COVID-19 has impacted plans to a certain extent, and we have had to rely on mostly digital engagement, but the company is ready to scale these back up once the situation improves."

Mr Kruiuzenga notes that much like with children's oral care, there aren't many oral health brands currently pursuing sustainability in Thailand. With Jordan actively developing products with this in mind, the public can be confident they are using something as good, if not better than traditional dental care products, and have a good conscience about their choice of products too.

Thailand may also hold the key to acceptance of sustainable oral care products throughout Southeast Asia. Not only is it the largest single dental health market in the region, but the country tends to be where trends first gain a foothold.

"One thing we have learned is that Thailand is a trendsetter in the region. Many trends, mainly from Japan and South Korea become localised in Thailand and then make their way to Malaysia, Indonesia and elsewhere," Mr Kruiuzenga states. "If people in Thailand embrace sustainable oral care products and children's dental care, then we will likely see their acceptance increase in nearby countries." ■



PHOTO: JORDAN

Above left: Childhood dental health care is an area of emphasis for Jordan in Thailand as the country struggles with Early Childhood Caries. Above: The Jordan Green Clean line is becoming more popular with younger buyers embracing sustainable oral care products.

Facts

- Jordan dental products have been available in Thailand since 1978
- The company opened official stores on Lazada and Shopee this year in a bid to focus on e-commerce
- Jordan Green Clean toothbrushes are made from 100 percent recycled plastic in the handle
- In Thailand, 53 percent of children three and under have at least one cavity
- Jordan develops products tailored exclusively to children based on their age



PHOTO: SAMITIVEJ HOSPITAL

Robots won't be replacing doctors, nor will AI be making medical decisions in place of people.

The Real Future of Healthcare

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

At Samitivej Hospital, the future of healthcare is experience driven. Technology is in conjunction with real world knowledge to better manage treatment and ensure higher success rates.

"In addition, technology allows us to and create closer relationships with our patients", says Dr Chairat Panthuraamphorn, CEO and Managing Director at Samitivej Hospital.

When he assumed the role of CEO in 2014, he created teams to think about the future operating model of the hospital. The goal was to centralise all efforts around digitalisation of healthcare. Being ahead of the curve ensured it was prepared for the unexpected.

"In March 2019, we were the first private hospital in Thailand to launch a telemedicine platform and COVID-19 has obviously seen its usage expand. One thing we have realised is that we aren't going back to the old ways, so it is important we build upon our new platforms," Mr Nicolas Leloup, Samitivej Hospital Head of International Marketing, states. "We will use online channels even more in the future. It allows

doctors to have a closer relationship with patients. For example, wearables can monitor health data and trigger alerts for a nurse or doctor who can then reach out to them directly."

Big data and artificial intelligence (AI) are two more key components of digitalisation. While Samitivej is only scratching the surface of their potential, each part of the hospital's innovation roadmap.

"AI and Big Data should be part of the same vision as they complement each other. However, in its early stages, we see that big data is more planned at the corporate level with our CEO's vision and capital expenditure allocation. AI is used more in medical applications by our doctors," Mr Leloup reports. "And it makes sense because big data requires a full transformation or at least adaptation of our IT infrastructure and capabilities."

Why AI?

Samitivej is now actively using AI technology in its facilities after testing the EndoBrain-EYE and EndoBrain programs for over a year. It aids in diagnosis of colorectal polyps during colonoscopies with the software alerting doctors to potential complications either in real time or during recordings.

In addition to this, AI is also being used to analyse imaging from MRIs and other scans. It can assist radiologists in locating issues by identifying patterns from similar patients which allows them to make a more informed diagnosis. Of course, this has led to some misconceptions about the role doctors are left to play.

"I would like to say that AI is not here to replace doctors. It is here to help doctors. It's a tool that allows doctors to solve more complex problems, reduce the trial-and-error period, bring better care to patients, and, in the long run, reduce the cost of treating one disease," Mr Leloup notes.

He does admit that there was some initial scepticism about the new AI tools at first which is why the hospital tested the programs for more than a year. This provided doctors with time to learn what was behind the AI and how the algorithm made recommendations.

Data Driven

There is still a long way to go before the power of big data can be harnessed in Thailand. The country's historic reliance

on paper documents and the high costs of digitalisation means it won't be easy to fully implement.

"It is a huge and costly undertaking to transition and convert to full electronic data, capture all data points, have a clean database and develop the capabilities to accurately model and leverage all this data. Not to mention all the IT infrastructure required to support data acquisition and processing," Mr Leloup states.

However, its eventual affect cannot be understated with Mr Leloup pointing out that successful big data implementation will provide doctors and medical facilities with much more knowledge. Some of its applications are simple yet vital, such as improving staffing efficiency. Others, like cancer treatment, are more complex.

"One example of big data's usage is the building of predictive profiles to help with oncology, the study of cancer. Treatments tend to be done individually through trial and error. It is a process that can take time. When you have big data and a profile of similar patients, it can help provide a better starting point," Mr Leloup explains. "When there is a predictive profile, you are able to make a more informed decision. Saving time allows us to better manage treatment and creates higher success rates."

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the use of big data is related to privacy. Mr Leloup acknowledges that while these concerns are valid, both the hospital and healthcare sector as a whole have several strong safeguards in place.

"The data itself needed is not tied to a single person. There isn't a lot that can be done with one person's data," Mr Leloup points out. "Additionally, healthcare is a heavily regulated sector and patient privacy rights are at the core of how we treat private personal

medical information. Moreover, like all companies, we comply with GDPR requirements."

Human Element

Innovation isn't limited to technology. New techniques and programs can be just as transformational. In 2007, Samitivej Hospital was the third hospital in Thailand to receive JCI accreditation. Today, there are more than 60 JCI accredited hospitals in the Kingdom.

Samitivej wanted to go beyond this standard and enhance the quality of care it could provide. This led to the launch of the Medical Affiliation Program with overseas hospitals.

The innovative exchange program began with Sano Hospital in Japan and focused on gastrointestinal health and colorectal cancer, an area that was limited in Thailand. It has proven to be extremely successful with Samitivej's adenoma detection rate (how often a physician finds precancerous polyps during a colonoscopy) improving from 25 to 70 percent.

"Many doctors in Thailand don't have expertise in colonoscopies," Mr Leloup says. "Japanese doctors came to Thailand where they helped their Thai counterparts build up knowledge and learn from experience. Meanwhile, the doctors from Japan had the opportunity to see Thai patients which provided them experience with cases that may not be prevalent in Japan."

In 2015, a partnership with Doernbecher Hospital (OHSU) in the United States was established. As the first private children's hospital in Thailand, it was important for Samitivej to learn from one of the pediatric and neonatal intensive care units in the world. The skills and knowledge acquired have been put to good use.

"For neonatal aeromedical transportation, we have been able to pick up prematurely born babies that were in facilities which couldn't provide the level of care required," Mr Leloup details. "We have done several missions in Thailand or neighbouring countries for babies born at 900 grams or lower. The lowest birth weight baby born at Samitivej is 500 grams. The progress made over the past 10 years is incredible."

Putting It Together

The real future of healthcare isn't one piece of technology or one program. For Samitivej, it's about bringing these innovations together to prevent health issues instead of treating sick people. In order to accomplish this, the hospital is focused on expanding service and not space. According to Mr Leloup, advancements ensure the quality of care is the same, if not better, while offering a richer experience overall.

"The healthcare sector has grown bigger and bigger over the last 100 years. A lot of this has been space related. We always needed more facilities. Now with new technology, you don't need more or bigger hospitals," Mr Leloup explains. "The goal now is to create a more distributed health network where experts help manage your healthcare on an ongoing basis. Primary care can be done remotely. Tertiary care will be minimised and specialised. Technology is accelerating this trend."

Samitivej's efforts in the innovation space have been recognised with several honours including Best Smart Hospital Thailand in the Asia-Pacific region at the GlobalHealth Asia – Pacific Awards 2021. And while the hospital is proud of this, Mr Leloup believes there is still a lot of work left.

"We are just at the beginning of the journey. Even so, I am impressed at how every stakeholder in the hospital has embraced the challenge. But this is an effort that still needs structuring and work," he concludes. ■



PHOTO: SAMITIVEJ HOSPITAL

Above left: Samitivej is providing AI tools to doctors in solving more complex problems, such as diagnosing colorectal polyps. Above: Big Data will eventually be used to create predictive profiles that can help with oncology.

Facts

- Samitivej Hospital was the first private hospital in Thailand to launch a telemedicine platform
- The Medical Affiliation Program allows Samitivej to learn from and share knowledge with overseas hospitals
- Samitivej is now actively using AI technology to analyse imaging from MRIs and other scans
- The hospital tested its AI program for more than a year before implementing it
- Samitivej won Best Smart Hospital Thailand in the Asia-Pacific region at the GlobalHealth Asia – Pacific Awards 2021



PHOTO: NORWAY CONNECT

Countries like Thailand and Indonesia can provide Nordic companies with new opportunities. However, it's not as easy as showing up and seeing results.

Willing, Able and Ready?

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

These challenging markets require businesses to quickly build up a network and navigate tricky cross-cultural issues to succeed.

Governments across Southeast Asia have realised they need foreign investment as they look to restart their economies in the aftermath of COVID-19. This has created new opportunities for Norwegian and Nordic companies looking to enter the region.

"The timing to enter couldn't be better. You are seeing countries such as Indonesia and Thailand do more to bring in foreign investment. Entering now is an attractive opportunity," Mr Axel Blom, Founder and Director at Norway Connect, says.

An example of these efforts is the massive change happening in Indonesia to make the country more investor friendly. The country's Omnibus Law is streamlining regulations, simplifying the tax code and permitting 100 percent foreign ownership of companies.

In many ways, the Omnibus Law in Indonesia has taken Thailand's Foreign Business Act to the next level. And while it would be easy to lump the two countries together, Mr Per Ecker Managing Director at Seven Stones Indonesia, Jakarta office, Partner of Norway Connect Indonesia and

Chairman of the Indonesia Norway Business Council, sees Indonesia becoming something quite different from Thailand.

"Indonesia is on track to be the world's fourth largest economy. There are many unique opportunities in multiple industries here," Mr Ecker states. "The country has a young, educated population and plenty of labour. Natural resources are in abundance. Everything needed is already here but there is little in terms of refinement."

Meanwhile, Thailand continues to be a country where Norwegian businesses find success. Mr Blom points out that the government is now exploring new avenues to encourage foreign investment to kickstart the economy.

Opportunities are present but companies considering entering countries such as Thailand or Indonesia need to be willing, able and ready and able for such a task.

Approach and Mindset

One of the methodologies Mr. Blom brought along from Innovation Norway was the Willing, Able and Ready

assessment. This refers to three tangible traits companies entering new markets must possess.

"Willing means having the necessary ambitions, plans and attitudes required to succeed in those markets. Top management and the board must also approve of the plans. Able is having the necessary competence and resources to succeed. Ready means checking that there is a realistic basis for success in terms of both market acceptance of the product/service and timing," Mr Blom explains.

Mr Ecker adds the right approach is just one part of the equation when entering a country like Indonesia or Thailand where unforeseen challenges can arise.

"You can't Google yourself into a market. The issues are too complex, and need to be experienced first-hand," Mr Ecker says. "Cultural understanding can be a challenge. Reading things and decoding signs can be impossible without local knowledge. How to understand and act on local regulations is not always straightforward."

This has seen numerous companies take a negative view of the markets, Indonesia in particular, over the years. Mr Ecker notes misconceptions or a lack of understanding can lead to a missed opportunity.

"Indonesia is not so easy to understand with a pair of Norwegian glasses on. It is often misunderstood and regarded as a hostile marketplace when it comes to legality and transparency," Mr Ecker. "This is, in some cases, correct. But usually, it is used as an excuse to not enter the market. This leads to Nordic companies missing out on one of the fastest growing economies in the world."

Having the right approach and mindset is a good start when entering Indonesia, Thailand or other countries in Southeast Asia. But this is still part of a longer process businesses need to be ready for.

"Even if you make it past the first hurdle, it is still important to have connections and meet the right people. It can be hard to find partners and establish key connections in the region," Mr Ecker notes.

Innovation Norway had filled this role in the region. That changed when the Norwegian government opted to prioritise larger export markets with growth potential and closed offices in Indonesia, Thailand and elsewhere over the past five years. While this was a loss, it presented those who had been working side-by-side with the organisation a chance to fill the gap.

A Bridge to ASEAN

While Norway Connect first launched in 2017 in the aftermath of Innovation Norway's Thailand office closing, the firm's origins stretch back much further. Mr Blom's operating company, Blue Business Solutions, operated on behalf of Innovation Norway in Thailand since 2008 as well as representing many other Norwegian companies.

"I had already been in Thailand for 25 years, having worked as head of Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) in Thailand for 15 years before leaving to start my own company," Mr Blom details. "With a long track record, during which time I also had been president of the Thai-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce, I had built up a large network across many industries. Having been in Thailand for such a long time, I had a leg in both cultures, being able to understand the Thai business culture while at the same time understanding the needs of the

Norwegian business sector."

It was a similar story when the Innovation Norway office in Indonesia closed three years later. Understanding the country's potential, Seven Stones Indonesia (SSI) stepped up to bridge the gap here. Founded in Bali by Mr Terje Nilsen, SSI has robust offerings in the property, investment/business advisory, legal and marketing/branding sectors.

The firm also opened an office in Jakarta which Mr Ecker heads up. Together with Mr Nilsen, SSI boasts more than 55 years of combined experience working either in or with Indonesia. This is vital for businesses needing on-boarding support for a possible entrance into the company.

"Norway Connect, through its local partner in Indonesia, has the finger on the pulse when it comes to observing the fast-moving changes in this marketplace. Both culturally and professionally we understand the differences, evaluate the risk and are able to give recommendations of how to act and with whom to partner up with," Mr Ecker says.

He continues, "Additionally, we can offer on-boarding services or represent the client in the market if this is preferred. We have a one-stop offering in Indonesia as we look to bridge the gap for Norwegian and Nordic companies that wish to enter this fast-growing economy."

It is important to note Norway Connect is not a carbon copy of Innovation Norway. The organisation does not provide financing to companies nor are services subsidised by the Norwegian government. So, while the privately owned network does mimic the role of Innovation Norway's foreign offices in terms of assisting Norwegian firms expanding into markets, it does not compete in the same countries. Another key difference is that Norway Connect works with other Nordic businesses.

Ultimately, Innovation Norway and Norway Connect are both a launch point. According to Mr Ecker and Mr Blom, starting in Indonesia and Thailand usually means finding the right partner, although locating one may not be a straightforward endeavour. Their experiences have shown meeting someone who can be trusted, let alone one that will provide a straight answer, is often a challenge.

Having a local connection or representation is good way to overcome that challenge when entering Indonesia and Thailand but Mr Ecker and Mr Blom once again stress the need for businesses to be willing, able and ready. From there, Norway Connect can tap into its strengths.

"We have a pragmatic approach looking at what we think is possible to do as well as what is not feasible. Our strength lies in our network, our expertise and our cross-cultural understanding. Through the years we have had assignments in industries from consumer-related sectors to purely industrial sectors," Mr Blom notes. "We try to encourage businesses in sectors where Norway and the Nordic countries have strong footprints and where there also is a demand for products and services in the countries where we are present."

Further Expansion

Norway Connect's expansion into Indonesia in 2021 was recently followed by the organisation joining the independent business advisory network Asian Insiders. This gives Norway Connect's clients access to industry experts all over Asia. See further details on Asian Insiders' [website](#). ■

Facts

■ Norway Connect opened in Thailand and Malaysia in 2017 and in Indonesia in 2021 in the wake of Innovation Norway's departure

■ Norway Connect offers a Nordic centric business advisory and representation business assisting Norwegian and Nordic companies expanding into Thailand and Indonesia

■ Norway Connect's offices are led by Norwegians with 20-30 years' business experience in respective countries

■ Indonesia recently passed the Omnibus Law which permits 100 percent foreign ownership of companies

■ Many ASEAN countries are looking for new foreign investment to aid in economic recoveries

■ Norway Connect recently joined the independent business advisory network [Asian Insiders](#) covering most Asian countries.



PHOTO: NORWAY CONNECT

Above left: Norway Connect's Thailand team (left to right): Marketing Manager Phuchisa Termdejtanakul, Managing Director Axel Blom and Researcher Pa-pavinee Pimsomrudee. Above: In Indonesia Norway Connect's team is headed by CEO Terje Nilsen (from right to left) in Bali and Managing Director Per Ecker in Jakarta as well as General Manager Julia Nilsen and CFO Ridwan Jasin Zachrie



We open doors to selected markets in Southeast Asia enabling value creation for Nordic companies through presence in the region.

<https://norway-connect.com>

NORWAY
CONNECT

The Graphs

In order to give the readers an understanding of where the Asian countries are in their development, we have assembled an overview of various indicators for Norway, USA and the most important South and Southeast Asian markets. The graphs in the two right columns are the result. Countries are listed by their two-letter ISO 3166-1 code. The data is assembled from a number of sources. See below for a full list.

Basic Figures Norway 2021

GDP Growth 2019	0.7%
GDP Growth 2020 projected	-0.7%
Export Growth 2020	-15.0%
Export Growth 2021	77.0%
Trade Balance 2021	NOK 106.0 bill
Current Account Balance	NOK 22.7 bill
Int'l Reserves (Dec21)	NOK 743.4 bill
Unemployment (2021/Q4)	3.4%
Corporate Income Tax	22%
Value Added Tax	25%

Norway's Top 10 Exports 2021

	%/value	NOK bill
Gas	36.1%	498,016
Petroleum	29.5%	406,507
Fish	8.5%	116,610
Non-ferrous metals	5.1%	69,835
Industrial machinery	4.5%	61,610
Chemicals	1.9%	26,726
Electric Current	1.7%	17,007
Iron and steel	1.2%	16,338
Scientific instruments	0.9%	12,366
Others	9.3%	128,221
Total	(+77.0% vs 2020)	1,377,795

Geography

Geographic Area:	385,199 sq. km
Highest peak: Galdhøpiggen	2,469 m
Inland water areas:	16,360 sq. km
Coastline:	25,148 km

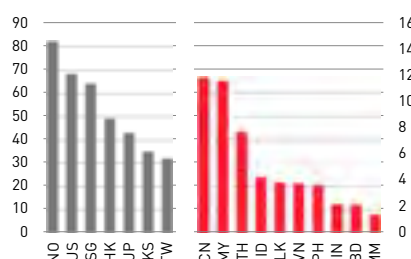
Demographics 2020

Population Norway:	5.4 mill
Population Oslo:	1,043,168
Life expectancy M/F NO:	81.5/84.8
Inhabitants per sq. km land area:	14.0
Population Growth:	0.84%

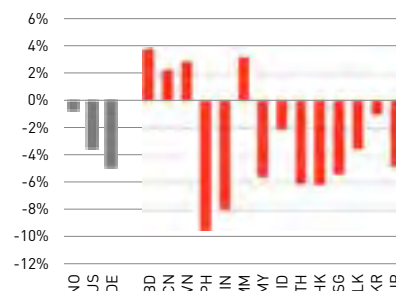
Sources:

GDP/Capita: Wikipedia/IMF; GDP Growth: Wikipedia/CIA Factbook; Global Competitiveness: World Economic Forum; Inflation: CIA; Ease of Doing Business and Days to Start a Business: World Bank; Corruption: Transparency International; Democracy Index: Economist Intelligence Unit; Mobile Telephone Penetration: World Bank; Electric Consumption: International Energy Agency
Basic Figures, Norway: Statistics Norway. Data was downloaded from sources on 30 January 2022

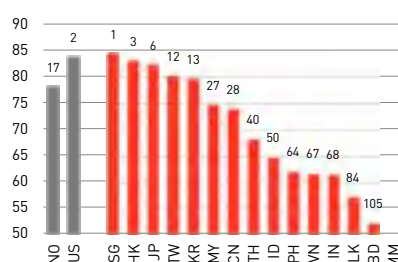
Nominal GDP/Capita 2021 (TUSD)



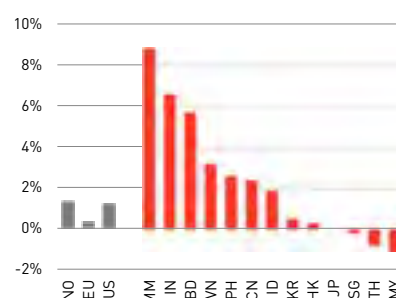
GDP% Growth 2020



Global Competitiveness Ranking 2019



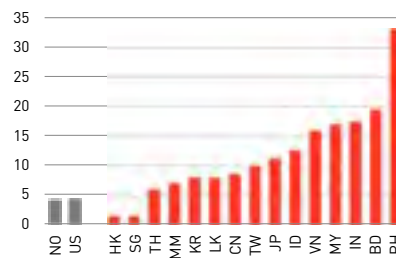
Inflation 2020



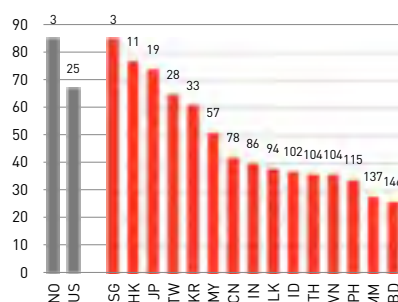
Ease of Doing Business Ranking 2020



Doing Business 2020 Days to Start a Business



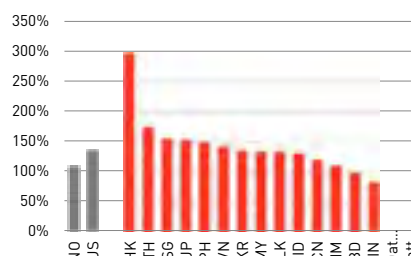
Corruption Ranking 2020



Democracy Index 2020



Mobile Telephone Penetration 2020



Electric Consumption kWh/Capita 2019

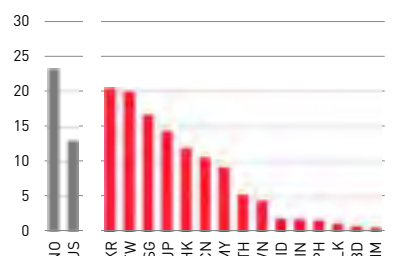




PHOTO: KRABI SPESIALISTEN

For nearly 20 years, Krabi Spezialisten has provided travellers with the experience of a lifetime in a responsible manner.

A Better Holiday

CHEYENNE HOLLIS

The company believes in minimising the negative social, environmental and economic impact tourism can have on local communities

Thailand is currently preparing to welcome tourists for the first time in nearly two years. Both the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration and Thai government have signed off on plans, although those within the travel sector aren't yet sure how the situation will unfold.

Ms Ingeborg Falset Kristensen, Krabi Spezialisten Managing Director, explained that her company was taking a wait-and-see approach. After so much uncertainty, the key is to be flexible.

"We have created many plans because we just don't know what will happen at the moment. Our hope is that people start to return in the coming months with the high season in 2022 being very strong. But we must be prepared for all other scenarios," Ms Kristensen said.

There may be some changes when visitors finally return en masse to the country's popular destinations. But Krabi Spezialisten will continue to offer tourists an experience of a lifetime in Krabi, one of Thailand's most beautiful getaways.

"We like to think anything is possible. We can provide tailor-made holidays where you are cared for from the moment you step off the airplane to being boarded back on it," Ms Kristensen reported. "Everything is taken care of including the small things you may not always consider. The difference between us and our competitors is that we look after every last detail."

Ms Kristensen's journey in the

hospitality industry inspired the vision for Krabi Spezialisten. Her first job in Thailand was at one of Phuket's most well-known luxury resorts. The more she travelled around the Kingdom, the more she realised it was possible to combine five-star resort quality with a local feeling to offer visitors a once in a lifetime experience.

"It is important to offer visitors something unique. A trip where they can avoid the crowds and enjoy a holiday that has been personalised. Who wants to be in crowded places doing something everyone else is doing, especially in light of the current situation?" Ms Kristensen questioned.

That being said, tourism can come at a price which is usually at the expense of the environment and local community. This plays an important role in guiding the services Krabi Spezialisten provides.

"Mass tourism is obviously an issue in Thailand, but people don't always give a lot of thought to it. We want to give back to Thailand and the local community since we are a part of it. This is something that other operators can lose sight of," Ms Kristensen noted. "Sustainability factors into this as well. You have operators using plastic bottles or following other practices that aren't sustainable. This is a huge issue that starts with education. We must teach everyone the need for sustainability."

Being sustainable isn't easy but Krabi Spezialisten recognises the

hard work is what's best for both the environment and guests. The travel provider has sought out partnerships to accomplish some of its sustainability goals. It is a member of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and is close to becoming a certified Travelife agent. Additional partnerships with Starboard, Refill My Bottle and Trash Hero Ao Nang help create action at the grassroots level.

"Our partnerships allow us to do more. There are even some initiatives, such as using sunscreen that doesn't damage coral reefs, that we implemented before they were widespread. And, of course, we still want to do more," Ms Kristensen said. "Our hope is that one day we will see electric cars and boats in Krabi. It won't happen overnight, but this is something we strive for."

While work continues on environment and local community efforts, COVID-19 required Krabi Spezialisten to rethink other aspects of its business. The company used to be focused exclusively on overseas clients but pivoted to the domestic market during the pandemic. The results were very positive and it's now exploring new opportunities.

"Currently, we are focusing on MICE opportunities in the educational and business sectors. For the former, there are many learning activities in Krabi with sustainable education being an area we hope to focus on," Ms Kristensen stated. "As for business MICE opportunities, there really isn't a better or more memorable place than Krabi for corporate retreats or company outings."

TNCC Members can receive a 10 percent discount when booking directly with Krabi Spezialisten. ■

Above: Krabi Spezialisten Managing Director Ms Ingeborg Falset Kristensen hopes tourism picks up in 2022

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