

Stronger united

AS THAILAND TAKES OVER THE ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP THIS YEAR, ITS SIGHTS ARE SET ON A STRONGER ASEAN WITH A CLEARER VISION FOR THE FUTURE.



More than five decades ago, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was born. On 8 August 1967, the Bangkok Declaration was signed at Saranrom Palace in Bangkok, Thailand, thus establishing ASEAN. Since then, ASEAN has grown from an Association of five to a community of ten. Comprising Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, ASEAN has become a vibrant regional organisation that has touched the lives of more than six hundred million people in Southeast Asia and countless others beyond.

Today, ASEAN is the world's sixth largest economy. It is also one of the world's top tourist destinations. Given its great cultural diversity and natural scenery, combined with its strong economic potential and regional peace and stability, it is no wonder why the ASEAN region has attracted tourists, investors, scholars and traders over the decades. This makes ASEAN one of the key crossroads of the Asia-Pacific.

From its people, its natural wonders to its rich cultural heritage, the beauty of the ASEAN region is well-recognised by the world.

ASEAN has produced well-known sporting stars such as Thai world boxing champion Khaosai Galaxy and Indonesian world-class badminton player Rudy Hartono. It has produced international stars such as Filipina singer Lea Salonga and Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh. It boasts some of the world's premier beaches from Phuket to Bali to Boracay, as well as internationally recognised cultural sites such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Borobudur

in Indonesia, and the Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar. It also hosts some of the world's most dynamic Smart Cities in Singapore.

The ASEAN Community, as ASEAN is known today, is one of the reasons why the region continues to enjoy growth and prosperity, amounting to some five percent in 2018. There is peace in the region, alongside a culture of cooperation and consensus-building. This regional organisation is committed to promoting closer cooperation and integration in all areas that better the lives of people, whether in the economic, political-security or socio-cultural sphere.

Internally, the ASEAN Community seeks to promote better welfare for the people of the region, by advancing human security and promoting better social safety nets, and it also aims to better protect the region from pandemics and public health threats. Indeed, the close cooperation of ASEAN public health sectors has been a key factor why pandemics such as Ebola and the Zika virus have not been able to threaten the health of the general population in this highly-connected and integrated region.

ASEAN has also helped reduce development divides and close gender gaps across the region, while minimising the impact of natural disasters, through close cooperation in early warning, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. For example, ASEAN's average per capita income has risen 33 times, from USD122 in 1967 to slightly over USD4,000 today. It has encouraged greater travel amongst its citizens, resulting in better mutual understanding amongst the peoples of ASEAN. After all, no visas are generally required for ASEAN nationals to travel to ASEAN countries.

Externally, ASEAN continues to reach out to the Asia-Pacific and the world, building regional and global partnerships to better the lives of the people of Southeast Asia. ASEAN has free trade agreements with many countries and continues to organise important regional meetings that bring the international community together to address the key global challenges of our times, from climate change to financial inclusion, and from dealing with the Fourth Industrial



Revolution to greater competition in the global market place.

From the East Asia Summit to the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN has created frameworks for dialogue and cooperation that bring countries from inside and outside the region together to promote peace and security, as well as economic dynamism and sustainable development for this region and beyond.

In short, ASEAN is a constructive force for progress for Southeast Asia, the Asia-Pacific and the world, and host to many multinational companies and international organisations that engage actively in this part of the world.

In 2019, Thailand begins its role as Chair of ASEAN and host to hundreds of meetings and events that bring all ten ASEAN member states as well as countless other international partners from Asia, Europe and the Americas together to help make this region and the world a better place. As ASEAN Chair, Thailand hopes to promote sustainability in all dimensions so that the ASEAN Community will be people-centred, leaves no one behind and looks to the future.

Thailand welcomes all visitors to be a part of this ASEAN Chairmanship story, to become better acquainted with ASEAN by visiting Thailand and other ASEAN member states in 2019, and to witness the many events, activities and celebrations nationwide in Thailand as we celebrate being the Chair of ASEAN.

Welcome to the Kingdom of Thailand, the birthplace of ASEAN in 1967 and the ASEAN Chair in 2019! Be a special part of the ASEAN Community, even for just a few days, and join us in celebrating this momentous occasion. ❖

