

Meet H. E. Berit Basse, the new Danish Ambas



Ms. Berit Basse first came to Singapore as a young back-packer in the mid-eighties and then went on to have a prolific career in international affairs spanning across Europe and Africa. She is delighted to be back in Singapore as the new Danish Ambassador, her first assignment in Asia.

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues
Photo by Kim Birkkjaer Lund

With a Master of Science in International Business and Politics and Intercultural Communication, Ambassador Berit Basse has always sought challenging assignments, starting with her time in Senegal with the UNDP to her prior role as Head of Department - Strategy, Quality and Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Denmark. As the new Danish Ambassador to Singapore, she is looking forward to continuing the great work of her predecessors and to further strengthening the knowledge of what Denmark and Danish companies have to offer the ASEAN region.

Singapore exceeds all expectations!

Ambassador Berit Basse, then an enthusiastic 22-year-old back-packer traveling across Asia, fondly recalls her first, daylong stopover in Singapore in the mid-eighties. "Even back then, it struck me as orderly and clean", she exclaims.

With her first month as Danish Ambassador to Singapore already behind her, Ms. Berit Basse is quick to point out the things that she appreciates most about Singapore.

"From the time you arrive at Changi airport, you get an overwhelming sense of how welcoming Singapore is", she adds. In her own experience as well as that of her predecessors and colleagues, Singapore is a wonderfully easy place to live and work, she adds.

Ambassador Basse also appreciates the manner in which Singapore is governed, very professional and business-like with clear-cut goals and strategies, swift decision making, short wait time from decision to execution and defined consequences if plans are not executed as should they be.

Just returning from a morning function at the Istana to meet the President of Mexico Felipe Calderon Hinojosa, Ambassador Basse appreciates the Singapore tradition of inviting all ambassadors whenever there is a visiting dignitary. "It's a wonderful

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opportunity to meet colleagues and ministers from other nations", she enthuses.

She is also amazed at how accessible the Singapore Government is. "If you have business to discuss, you can definitely contact a minister directly."

Ms. Berit Basse's journey

Ambassador Basse's illustrious professional journey is one, which very few can hope to emulate.

At the United Nations Development Program office in New York in the early nineties, Ms. Basse's was gearing up for her first assignment. Given her proficiency in the French language and Haiti being a franco-phone country, it was the logical match. But a coup d'état there meant that she would have to go to another French speaking country. Her first preference being Asia, she requested to be posted there but was assigned to Senegal.

After her first assignment in Senegal, Ms. Basse has also lived and worked in Denmark, Uganda and Germany in various capacities, with each role having its share of unique professional and cultural experiences as well as challenges.

Since those early days, Ms. Basse has wanted to work in Asia. She is ecstatic when she declares that the highlight of her career is most definitely her role as Danish Ambassador to Singapore.

Briefly touching on the subject of culture shock, in her case, it has more to do with re-integrating into life in Denmark after her various international assignments.

The Danish community in Singapore

With more than 1,500 Danes living in Singapore and over 150 Danish companies operating out of here, there is a relatively strong Danish presence in Singapore.

On 17th August 2012, the Danish Business Association of Singapore (DABS) organized a welcome dinner for Ambassador Basse, which provided an excellent forum for her to interact with the DABS members

on a one-to-one basis.

Keeping in mind the crucial role that the maritime sector plays for both Denmark and Singapore, Ambassador Basse recently hosted a dinner for the Danish maritime community, an avenue for her to reach out to this key business segment.

Through the Danish Embassy, Ms. Basse has also been actively involved with the many social and fund raising activities organized by the Danish Seaman's Church, a common gathering place for all Danes in Singapore.

Back to business

Ambassador Basse's first month in office has already been a very busy one. Last week, she hosted Mr. Ole

plays both from a business as well as a political perspective.

From the business perspective, the ASEAN region is being viewed as a key economic growth force, despite a slight slow down in the overall growth rate. Many Danish companies looking to enter the ASEAN market or China first establish their presence in Singapore due to its strategic location. Singapore also provides a conducive business environment with no corruption, several tax incentives and a robust infrastructure.

From the political standpoint, Singapore has a high status thanks to its socio-economic achievements over the years and is viewed as a highly stable political environment as well.

technologies, biotech and health/welfare related sectors. In addition, the maritime sector is one of the biggest in Singapore and is of mutual interest to both nations. She is keen to strengthen co-operation in this critical sector even further.

She adds, "Denmark and Singapore are both small countries. Today Singapore is facing welfare and economic challenges like falling birth rates, requests for paternity leave etc, areas in which Denmark has extensive experience." Furthermore, there is scope for dialogue and exchange of ideas between the two countries in priority sectors such as education, innovation and R&D.

Another item on her agenda is to raise the profile of not only Denmark but of Europe as a whole. Europe is Singapore's second largest trade partner and she hopes the new trade agreement between the EU and Singapore that will come into effect by fall 2012, will give a further boost to trade relations.

Life in Singapore

Ambassador Basse loves her new home, located close to the Singapore Polo Club on Thomson Road. With MacRitchie Reservoir less than a kilometer away, she cherishes the experience of jogging there. She remarks, "Singapore is much greener than I expected it to be."

She has 2 children, an 18 year old son and a 16 year old daughter studying in high school back in Denmark. "They will visit Singapore during their school breaks, the first one being in October & then during Christmas" she beams happily. Her partner Hans Holm also enjoys Singapore very much and divides his time between Holland and Singapore.

In the days to come, she is looking forward to exploring the many sights Singapore has to offer. "I look forward to exploring the various facets of Singapore - the museums, the fantastic attractions and most definitely, the culinary experiences one can have here from the top class restaurants to the local hawker center", she signs off with a dazzling smile.

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Sohn, the Danish Minister for Business & Growth who was in Singapore to further strengthen the maritime relations between the two countries.

"With a view towards increasing maritime co-operation, Singapore Minister of Transport, Mr. Lui Tuck Yew and Mr. Ole Sohn, signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will explore opportunities for collaboration in the areas of quality shipping, green shipping as well as maritime research and development, education and training," she asserts.

The Ambassador's viewpoint

Ambassador Basse goes on to elaborate on the critical role that Singapore

Given this background, the Danish embassy in Singapore plays the critical role of a facilitator to the Danish business community looking to enter ASEAN (or broadly Asia) via Singapore.

The way forward

During her upcoming 3 to 4 year tenure in Singapore, Ambassador Basse's top priority is to further strengthen the knowledge of what Denmark and Danish companies have to offer Singapore as well as the ASEAN region. Denmark has developed expertise in many different sectors such as water treatment, environmentally sustainable