



ABOVE
Clint Nagata chose to set up his company, Blink, in Bangkok because of the local workforce's distinct creativity
OPPOSITE
Blink's headquarter on Sathorn is a daytime home to many young local designers

still an underdog compared to its powerful neighbours. Nevertheless, quite a few multinational companies have picked it as a base and despite a number of reverses, political and otherwise, it has begun to emerge as a considerable regional hub. "It's a good base for us," Whitcraft says. RMA's core business necessitates much travel into post-conflict countries since its main offerings are vehicles, power generators and heavy equipment. Transportation and infrastructure were thus a significant factor in choosing a base. "I think transport connections are getting better," he continues. "Connections to Africa are still a little difficult but there are some direct flights."

Situated in the centre of the Asia-Pacific region, Thailand rightly markets itself as a port to the rest of Asia. Given the right strategy, such an advantage allows the country to catch up with more developed competitors in the region.

"When we look for a country that has a potential to grow in Asia, Thailand seems to always be the place," says Vizrt's Asia-Pacific president Michael Namatinia. The Norwegian TV production tool provider is a supplier behind prominent broadcasters such as CNN, Fox, NBC and, in Thailand, Channels 3, 9 and more. The company selected its Bangkok office to be the operation base for the Asia-Pacific region and one of its two R&D centres (alongside Bangladesh). In common with RMA, infrastructure tops the list of Vizrt's criteria. "The company initially searched for a country that provides accessibility; one that lets us easily access other Asian countries and has enough direct flights to the West as well," he explains. "Thailand could supply all that."

Many observers have noted a renewed enthusiasm and efficiency in government efforts to make Thailand more attractive, especially in the context of the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. The Board of Investment of Thailand (BOI) has led the way. "The Thai government is moving forward with the AEC and making Thailand an attractive logistic hub," says Namatinia. "Changes might not happen overnight but we have seen progress that's positive for foreign companies." BOI promotion permits 100 per cent foreign ownership in a Thai company and even allows foreign investors to own land. Vizrt, registered under BOI, has received much assistance to ease its operations. "It has been easier for us to bring expats in to transfer R&D knowledge to the local team," Namatinia says. The company used to employ more expatriates in the beginning but the number has slowly decreased because of the quota for short-term expat trainers. The expertise has now been transferred to the locals. "This is because of the help from BOI."

In order to encourage more companies to set up base here, BOI has also launched a new mechanism called the Regional Operating Headquarters regulation (ROH), which offers tax and non-tax incentives to companies that establish their command centres in Thailand. Essentially, a company that has a minimum paid-up capital of 10 million baht or more and is set to provide services to at least three overseas branches of the enterprise is qualified to apply for ROH incentives. Under the scheme, the corporation is entitled to a 10-year zero corporate income tax rate on overseas income and tax on domestic operations is reduced from 30 per cent (the non-ROH company rate) to 10 per cent. When compared with Singapore's 17 and Hong Kong's 16.5 per cent rates, the policy offers considerable incentives



for investors who are targeting the region. Other administrative procedures concerning expat staff are also made easier.

"I think it's a big step for Thailand as a regional hub," Whitcraft says. RMA, which has 16 branches worldwide, is registered under the incentive and is very satisfied with the benefits it has received. "It has made a lot of difference; for example, enabling us to get more work permits for international staff and making financial control easier." Individual expatriates also benefit when working for an ROH-registered company; instead of a progressive taxation rate of 10-36 per cent, they are entitled to a flat 15 per cent tax. "You are entitled to that exemption for eight years then it expires," says Alex Brenneisen, RMA's vice president of corporate affairs. "The policy is there to ensure foreign staff do not go stale; so there's always fresh blood and fresh ideas coming into the country." ROH also provides essential business support with regard to technical requirements, marketing and research.

The cost of living is another advantage for Thailand. With its two competitors ranked

among the top 10 costliest cities for expatriates in Mercer's 2013 Cost of Living Survey, the Land of Smiles offers a safe haven to those who look for lower day-to-day expenses. "The cost of living affected our decision as well," Namatinia says. From lower rental fees to daily wages, expenses are clearly reduced if one plumps for Bangkok over, say, Hong Kong.

It may be more of a surprise to learn that another reason identified by our interviewees for setting up a head office in Thailand is the human resources aspect. Clint Nagata, founder and senior creative director of hospitality design company Blink Design Group, specifically came to Bangkok to start the enterprise, which has now expanded to Singapore, Shanghai and New Delhi, because of its creative workforce. "I find Thais very creative compared to others in the region," the American executive says. Blink's newly built headquarters, an open-plan office on the top floor of Bangkok City Tower, complete with rustic-looking furniture, a mezzanine, high ceilings and a view of busy Sathorn, was specifically designed to support this creative environ-

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Clint Nagata, Blink Design Group

The 300 List

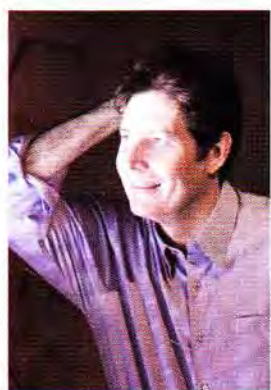
The centre of the world is increasingly shifting towards Asia; and at the centre of Asia we find Thailand. It's not surprising then that so many talented foreigners make their way here. The Expat Society 300 List identifies the brightest and the best of non-Thais living in Thailand. Some have been here for a matter of months, some for decades. But what unites them is that their contributions in their particular areas – business, diplomacy, academia, the arts, charity and more – make Thailand an even better, more prosperous, more interesting place. And maybe that will in turn encourage even more people to come in future years

THE 300 LIST



RITURAJ MOHAN

Managing director of Boots Retail (Thailand), Indian-born Briton Rituraj Mohan earned his BSc in pharmacy at the University of Sunderland in the UK and is fluent in Hindi and Punjabi in addition to English. A sports enthusiast, he goes for regular workouts at the gym and likes to spend time at the beach. He and his wife Sema have two children.



CHRISTOPHER GEORGE MOORE

An Oxford University graduate who has worked as a law professor, lawyer and journalist, Canadian Christopher G Moore, a resident of Thailand since 1988, is the author of 30 books. His popular Vincent Calvino crime series and the *Land of Smiles* trilogy have been translated into 14 languages. He is married to Dr Busakorn Suriyasarn, a consultant to the UN.



CARMEN MORENO

The Spanish ambassador to Thailand Carmen Moreno took up her posting in early 2013 after having lived in Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Cuba and China. She obtained her degree in law from Autonoma Madrid and is fluent in English, French, Italian and some Chinese, apart from her native tongue. A keen photographer, she loves trekking and travels to natural parks, mountains and the countryside for some quiet relaxation.



REX MORGAN

An on-and-off resident of Thailand for some 40 years and author of more than a dozen books, Rex Morgan divides his time between his Thai-style riverside house in Ayutthaya and his home in Bathurst, Australia. He is a major supporter of the SEA Write Awards and assists several local charities through his Rex Morgan Foundation. Born in Britain but now an Australian national, he has been honoured by both Queen Elizabeth and the Australian government.



ANDREW J B MORRIS

Settling in Thailand almost 30 years ago after working in Mexico and Brazil, British-born Canadian Andrew JB Morris currently serves as global technical adviser for Henkel Global, following his retirement. A supporter of the Thai Red Cross Society and Wat Praram 9, he is a keen marathon runner who enjoys collecting watches and music CDs and spending time at his holiday home in Hua Hin. Educated at Berkhamsted College, he is married to Srisuphang and they have three sons, James, Richard and John.



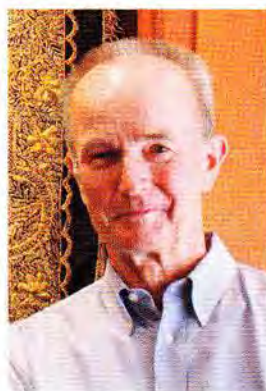
CLINT NAGATA

Founder and senior creative director of hospitality design concern BLINK Design Group, American Clint Nagata was recognised with the Hospitality Design Award for Best Luxury Hotel in 2012. A resident of Thailand for seven years, he holds an honours degree in architecture from the University of Hawaii. A bachelor and a keen traveller, he collects hotel key cards and enjoys diving in the Maldives.



DIRK NAUMANN

Hamburg-born Dirk Naumann has lived on-and-off in Thailand for almost four decades. A dealer in antiquarian maps, he serves as the honorary German consul for southern Thailand. In 2009, he received the Order of Merit from the German Federal president for his work in Phuket. For 25 years, he managed what eventually became the largest pharmaceutical distributor in Thailand. He has also lived in the Philippines, Singapore and the UK. He is married to interior designer Zhu and lists among his interests collecting Southeast Asian antiques and reading.



ANDERS NORMANN

A resident of Thailand for 45 years, Anders Normann is deputy chairman of the Bangkok Nursing Home Association and is also a board member of a number of local and overseas companies. Having served as Danish consul-general to Thailand since 1997, he has been conferred the title Knight of the Dannebrog Order by the Danish queen for his contributions to Thai-Danish relations. Recognised for his collection of Asian antiques and artefacts, Normann is the only foreigner with his own museum in Thailand, housed in his Nicole Wellness Center in Silom.



THOMAS NYBORG

A veteran of the jewellery industry and resident in Thailand for two decades, Dane Thomas Nyborg is senior vice-president, group manufacturing and managing director of Pandora Thailand. A graduate of the Gemological Institute of America, he also attended the CBS Copenhagen Business School, Sasin's Senior Executive Programme, and Henley Management College in the UK. He is married to Nirachara with three children, Pong, Axel and Lucas. He enjoys cycling and is co-founder of the Old Boys Cycling Club.



TORAJIRO OHASHI

Former president of Thai Hino Motor Sales, Torajiro Ohashi has lived in Thailand for 48 years and currently serves as a senior counsellor to Tilleke & Gibbins International. A Japanese national who speaks fluent Thai and English, he has been recognised by both the Japanese and Thai governments for his contributions to Thailand. The president of the Japanese Association of Thailand, he is also vice-chairman of the Thai-Japanese Association. Married to Chorthip, he supports several charities and enjoys golf, reading and going to the cinema.