



OUR SOUTHEAST ASIA STORY

BY SIR ALAN PARKER

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BRUNSWICK ARRIVED IN SINGAPORE IN 2013, as economies in the Asia-Pacific region were brimming with opportunity and optimism. We had clients there but wanted to open an office and be on the ground to follow our clients' growth and join in the energy and enthusiasm for Singapore.

Amazingly, a decade in, this story is still getting stronger, and possibly beginning a new phase. The opportunities in the region continue to grow, and

our clients all over the world are increasingly committed to it. Its role as a platform from which to build out across the region has never been stronger.

A city-state roughly half the size of London, it is the regional home to some of the world's largest corporations, many of whom will tell you it is the easiest and most efficient place on the planet to do business.

That is clearly not an accident. You feel it has been designed in that way from the moment you land at Changi airport. Everything is a testament

to that welcoming nature—and the experience continues in the country’s attitudes toward foreign business. Licensing and permitting are straightforward and comprehensible. The government is there to help, not inhibit. If you run into a problem, the bureaucracy will ride to your rescue, rather than tangle you up.

I have lost count of the number of times I have heard CEOs tell me about the wonders of Singapore, and the high caliber of its officials. If they wanted you to relocate there, they wouldn’t just talk about the warm weather, great food and the tax breaks. They would fly thousands of miles to see you in person, and describe the building they would build for you, the people they would help you hire. With reams of practical measures and promises, they would make the decision to invest there irresistible.

Singapore believes to its very core in the fundamentals that enable business to thrive: the rule of law; free markets; innovation; entrepreneurship; and perhaps above all, an education system that is the envy of the world.

And it is at the heart of the action in Southeast Asia. The region is well known for leapfrogging traditional development cycles, and disrupters are emerging in sectors as diverse as transport, banking, insurance, technology and retail. Indonesia, for

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example, is now becoming known as a tech hub, home to startups like GoTo and Traveloka that have achieved unicorn status on a mix of international and domestic investment. Vietnam is fast becoming a major player in international supply chains.

The region is the platform for some of the most exciting business stories. Singapore itself could have easily failed in its earliest days of independence, mired by geographical limitations, poverty, ethnic and linguistic divisions. Yet despite physical limitations and a complex history, it got on with putting itself where it is today. It refused to waste those years of early crisis and focused on its survival. It had a port and a geographical position, so turned itself into a major hub for shipping. And that was just the start.

Under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore wrote a very different story for itself. It became one of the purest triumphs of human capital and human wit that the world has ever seen. It is a terrific story of dogged optimism, hard work and achievement.

Yet the same challenges facing business worldwide today still affect the region: rising expectations from investors and NGOs on the role of business in society, increased pressure to limit their negative impact on the environment and biodiversity, a rising scrutiny of supply chains and labor conditions and an increasingly competitive market in which businesses battle to attract and retain the best talent. Meanwhile, Southeast Asia’s culture demands a more tailored, nuanced approach to communication—particularly in how businesses talk about the work they do and the contributions they make to society.

As a critical issues advisory firm, Brunswick does many different things for many people. But at the core of it all is great storytelling. One of the strongest themes to emerge from this special issue of the *Brunswick Review* is the value of telling stories that emerge from the markets where you do business. If you want to engage meaningfully with your key stakeholders and audiences, you must be on the ground, living where your business lives, listening to what they care about, and talking and acting in ways that make sense to them.

It is why Brunswick came to Singapore 10 years ago and why we believe more passionately than ever in Southeast Asia. The evidence is all around us and we feel privileged to be part of it. ♦

SIR ALAN PARKER is Chairman of Brunswick Group, which he founded in London in 1987. He has also served as Chair of Save the Children International. He was knighted in 2014 for services to business, charitable giving and philanthropy.