

VOYAGEUR

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Her Excellency Ms. Ping M. Kitnikone, Canadian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand, Kingdom of Cambodia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic

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CANADA'S NEW AMBASSADOR

Ping M Kitnikone, the new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the Kingdom of Thailand, Kingdom of Cambodia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, has been moving and living in different countries for a long time.

First, as a young refugee to Canada; then as she joined the Canadian foreign service in 1994, she was quickly assigned to Beijing, Taipei, Mumbai, Bangkok, Hanoi and now back to Bangkok.

Ambassador Kitnikone's heritage is rooted in South-east Asia. Her mother is Teochew-Laotian and her father was Hakka-Malay who met in China in the 1950s, when both of them followed many overseas Chinese youth to Mainland China. They quickly became disillusioned and made their way to Laos by way of Hong Kong where Ambassador Kitnikone and her siblings were born.

Following the fall of Laos, her family made their way, along with other displaced Lao and Vietnamese migrants, to Thailand before finally settling in Canada, Victoria British Columbia, to be exact.

It took the family three years to earn their Canadian

citizenship and to pay back, in instalments, the costs of their plane tickets. Her parents were very proud to be able to do so and remain deeply appreciative of having been selected by the Government of Canada.

Ambassador Kitnikone went on to pursue a Master's in Public Administration (MPA) at the University of Victoria. A co-op work term that was part of her program requirement with the then-Department of External Affairs Canada led her to a career in diplomacy.

Although her path to foreign service was a circuitous one (her first career choice would have been archeology!), she feels very fortunate to have a rotational career representing Canada abroad.

It helped that the Ambassador knew that she wanted to work in the public sector, so a diplomatic career offers a chance to have experiences unlike any other jobs interspersed with assignments in Ottawa that provide varied opportunities to contribute to the Canadian public service. Serving as an ambassador is the culmination of these experiences as it means keeping up with current events and governmental policies.



Along with the often-observed representational duties - such as the public speeches and receptions, an ambassador is also a public administrator. “You have to be flexible, adaptable and resilient,” she says. “Tactful communication is key to maintain productive and mutually respectful relationships with people not only outside of the embassy but also within.”

With the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) just celebrating its one-year anniversary and the establishment of an ASEAN-Canada Strategic Partnership in September of this year, Ambassador Kitnikone is delighted to be back in Thailand at such a meaningful moment. “ASEAN is central to Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy and the strategic partnership reaffirms our consistent support for ASEAN Centrality and for Thailand”, the Ambassador points out.





More pragmatically, investment in the strategy has translated to more resources available in the region. "We have added a second officer position in Vientiane and will soon welcome another in Phnom Penh," she says. "At the same time, we will be seeing expansion in such programs as consular and immigration in Bangkok. This is on top of the agricultural and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency position in Manila. These are just some examples of the early initiatives coming out of the IPS."

The Ambassador says that she looks forward to better articulate bilateral relations between Canada and Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, respectively. This can be a daunting task but she has a great team behind her, including an Office of the Embassy in Vientiane and another in Phnom Penh - both led by experienced and dedicated Heads of Office - in addition to the resources at the Embassy of Canada in Bangkok.

The Ambassador is delighted to be back in Thailand and we, the Canadian community in Thailand, are very happy to have her back.



| Ping M Kitnikone, the new Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand (centre), with the current CANCHAM Thailand board.