

BHKS

Belgium Hong Kong Society

SPRING 2026 #18

HONG KONG



Chairman's Message	2	HKTDC: A New Year to Deepen Ties Between Belgium and	
BHKS Background	3	Hong Kong Policies and Infrastructure in Hong Kong	15
Board member's Message	4	Belgians in Hong Kong	17
BHKS Activities 2025	5	Interview with David Lomastro	17
Chinese New Year Reception 2025	5	Interview with Mathieu Thys	20
Visit to Red Star Line Museum, Antwerp	7	Interview with Elise De Witte	23
Visit to Huyghe Brewery	7	BHKS Education Fund	25
Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival Antwerp 2025	8	Board members make a big splash in the Hong Kong Dragon	
BHKS 2025 End of Summer Event – The Port of Antwerp-Bruges	9	Boat Festival	25
Takeaways from the Chairman's trip to the 2025 Hong Kong		Participation of KU Leuven	26
Forum	10	Applications for BHKS Education Fund	27
The Latest Policies of Hong Kong to Promote Pillar Industries:		Applications to become BHKS Members	28
Insights from the Chief Executive's 2025 Policy Address	12	BHKS Structural Partners 2026	28

Chairman's Message



Alexander De Beir, *Chairman Belgium-Hong Kong Society*

Dear friends of Hong Kong,

The Belgium-Hong Kong Society (BHKS) organised various events in the past year to strengthen bilateral and business ties between Belgium and Hong Kong.

We started the year of the Snake with the well-attended Chinese New Year reception in the Museum of Arts and History in Brussels.

One week later, we visited the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp where we saw the exhibition of Hong Kong Chinese families who migrated to Belgium in the 1960s. Their entrepreneurial spirit continues and lives on through their descendants.

In March, we visited the Huyghe Brewery in Ghent. Founded in 1902, the Huyghe Brewery has garnered worldwide acclaim, particularly for its iconic Delirium Tremens, recognised by its signature pink elephant logo. This visit provided an exceptional opportunity to explore the brewery's rich history and innovative brewing techniques that have stood the test of time.

During our visit, the CEO, Mr. De Laet, shared insights into the Huyghe Brewery's commercial strategy in Asia. With a special focus on Hong Kong and China, the discussion shed light on how one of Belgium's oldest breweries continues to expand its global footprint.

A Hong Kong Film Night was held in April 2025, with a reception before the screening of *Twilight of the Warriors : Walled In*. Based on the notorious Kowloon Walled City, the film became the second-highest-grossing domestic film of all time in Hong Kong, and won Best Film at the 43rd Hong Kong Film Awards. The film was selected as Hong Kong's official entry for Best International Feature Film at the 97th Academy Awards.

The 7th edition of our annual September Business seminar was held in the iconic headquarters of the Port of Antwerp. Patrick Van Cauwenberghe, International Trade Networks Manager explained how the Port of Antwerp-Bruges has been successful in Belgium, Europe and the world. The

BHKS Background

Founded in 1986, the Belgium-Hong Kong Society's ("BHKS") objective has been to promote vital commercial, social, and cultural links between Belgium and Hong Kong, and to create a vibrant community for our members. BHKS is also a member of the Federation of Hong Kong Business Associations Worldwide ("FHKBA").

BHKS values the bilateral ties between Belgium and Hong Kong, an economic gateway between East and West, a hub of businesses and talents, and an international cosmopolis with good governance. All of our members have a connection to Hong Kong and share a deep passion for it. Joining us as a member, you will be offered privileged networking opportunities, first-hand information on Hong Kong and the

region, and other benefits. Our events are joined by a diverse range of trade associations and businesses, officials of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Brussels ("HKETO, Brussels") and the EU diplomatic corps.

We are truly grateful to the HKETO, Brussels for their continued support in co-organising various Hong Kong events in Belgium. BHKS belongs to all friends of Hong Kong and your participation is essential in helping us to improve. We have a handful of attractive activities awaiting your participation throughout the year. Should you have any feedback or comments on either the newsletter or BHKS as a whole, please contact us directly.

breadth of the Port's economic activities, as well as its embrace of innovative technologies, such as AI and piloted drones, and planned advancements towards a greener, more sustainable, and more efficient Belgian logistics corridor, inspired the over 130 BHKS members and guests who attended the event.

The Dragon Boat Festival held its 11th edition in the Port of Antwerp, with 20 Dragon boats taking part in the race. The BHKS Education Fund sponsored the boat of the University of Leuven in order to emphasise the importance of cultural and academic exchange between Belgium and HK.

BHKS continued on strengthening its board. Paul Melkebeke joined us and was appointed as head of the membership committee. We said goodbye to Michèle Surinx of FIT and welcomed her successor, Filippe De Potter.

We also added new corporate members and we are proud to have Cathay Pacific "on board" as one of our new structural partners.

The first week of December was the traditional Hong Kong Forum, where all members of the Hong Kong Federation of Business Associations Worldwide were invited to celebrate, learn and connect with each other and with Hong Kong. Present were 400 business people from 40 different countries. A delegation of 10 Belgians

attended the Forum. Most of us flew Cathay Pacific. The direct flight from Brussels to Hong Kong is a treat of first-class service, which I can warmly recommend.

The Forum started with one minute of silence as we mourned the casualties of the Tai Po fire on November 26th.

We learned about how Hong Kong has established itself as a super connector between East and West. We met with local established business owners and with young Chinese and western entrepreneurs who related their experiences of starting a business in Hong Kong. We celebrated friendship and dined in *The Starview – The One* in Tsim Sha Tsui, admiring the Hong Kong Skyline.

The Hong Kong Forum is the annual flagship event for anyone who wants to get the latest insights on doing business with Hong Kong. I invite all of you to join me at the next forum in December 2026.

A word of gratitude to HKETO, Brussels is in place. Their continued support gives us the possibility to work carefree in promoting business and cultural ties between Belgium and Hong Kong.

Dear friends, I wish you all a happy and prosperous year of the Horse.

New BHKS' Board Member's Message

Dear friends of Hong Kong,

It is an honour to address you, the members of the Belgium-Hong Kong Society at the start of this New Year. I would like to express my gratitude for the privilege of being part of the board of directors of the association. This engagement is in line with my professional activities with Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT). For most of my twenty years at FIT, I was active in the inward investment department, where I was closely involved in advising international companies with their expansion into Europe and assisting them with their investments in Flanders. In 2023, I was appointed Director for the Africa, Middle East, and South & Central Asia region and, since late 2025, Director of the Asia-Pacific & Middle-East region.

Hong Kong holds an important place for FIT in the Asia-Pacific region, and the relations between Hong Kong and Flanders are strong. Flanders is among Hong Kong's important trading partners within the European Union. In 2024, Hong Kong imported almost €1.6 billion worth of goods and products from Flanders. In the first 9 months of 2025, this import amounted to more than €1.1 billion. Exports from Flanders to Hong Kong mainly include pharmaceuticals, chemicals, machinery, diamonds and food products.

Flanders and Hong Kong enjoy strong two-way investment flows. Hong Kong offers companies an ideal location for regional headquarters and serves as a gateway to Mainland China and Asia. The investment opportunities are supported by a robust institutional framework, including bilateral investment protection arrangements and EU-level trade and investment policies.

On a more personal note, I still remember when I was a fresh graduate in economics and international relations and was taking my first steps in the world of foreign direct investments with the French Government, the double taxation treaty between Belgium and Hong Kong was the talk of the town; not only in the Brussels office, but



Filippe De Potter,
New board member of the Belgium-Hong Kong Society

also in the French headquarters. In 2003, Belgium was the first country to sign such a treaty with Hong Kong. This Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation was, and still is, a standard.

Flanders also functions as a strategic hub for Hong Kong businesses accessing the European Union. The port of Antwerp-Bruges plays a key role as an entry point into Europe for Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese trade. The targeted strategy of the Flemish government positions Flanders internationally as a technology region with spearheads in Digital Tech, Health Tech and Climate Tech. Flanders also boasts world class companies and research centres in chemistry & life sciences, cleantech/energy, (maritime) logistics, machinery/engineered solutions and professional services. These profiles align well with Hong Kong's priorities.

We believe that in the near future some of the best opportunities lie in green and fintech, offshore RMB, and capital markets, (bio)health innovation, Maritime & Logistics 2.0 (value added services) and GBA integration via the Northern Metropolis.

Together with my colleagues from the Asia-Pacific-desk and from FIT Hong Kong—Siegfried Verheijke and, from this summer onward, Tom Vermeulen—, we are ready to support our companies and our partners, further fostering partnerships. We will continue to organise regular business missions, trade fairs, and sector-specific dialogues to strengthen the commercial and investment ties.

BHKS Activities 2025

The BHKS has made many new attempts in 2025 to offer a diversity of activities to our members in different cities in Belgium. Besides many key events held in Brussels, such as the Chinese New Year Reception and the flagship “End of Summer” business seminar – held this year at the famous Havenhuis in Antwerp, BHKS organised a visit to the Red Start Line Museum in Antwerp, a guided tour at the Huyghe Brewery, supported the Dragon Boat Festival in Antwerp, and led a visit to Hong Kong for the 26th annual Hong Kong Forum. All these show the continuous efforts of BHKS to

innovate the scope of our activities where arts and culture certainly play a role in enhancing the Hong Kong-Belgium connection. In the coming year, BHKS will go on to reach out to Belgians who have links to Hong Kong in different cities and of different backgrounds.

Let’s look forward to an even more successful year for BHKS. We would also like to take the opportunity to thank all the members who participated in our events and for their unfailing support along the way.



Chinese New Year Reception 2025 27 January 2025

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Brussels, with the support of BHKS, hosted the annual Chinese New Year reception in Brussels, Belgium on 27 January 2025.

One of the most celebrated social events in the diplomatic circle in Europe, the reception attracted some 270 guests from officials of the European institutions, national governments, diplomatic missions, as well as senior representatives from trade and business, academia, arts and cultural sectors, media and also the Chinese community.



The opportunity was taken to encourage guests to visit Hong Kong through the re-launch of the direct flight between Brussels and Hong Kong in August, as well as by showcasing Hong Kong as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange through a cross-media performance fused with Chinese kung-fu, modern electronic music, comic and animation inspired by Hong Kong action movies was presented by the Hong Kong Arts Centre (Comix Home Base) in collaboration with different Hong Kong artists.



Visit to Red Star Line Museum, Antwerp

1 February 2025

The BHKS organised a visit to the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp, with a guided tour on 01 February 2025.

On the authentic site of the historic shipping company on Antwerp's Eilandje, the Museum tells a universal story of hope, dreams and the quest for happiness, based on personal stories of 20th-century emigrants. Starting from the historical story of European emigration via Antwerp to America, the Museum, together with visitors, witnesses and partners, encourages reflection and dialogue about migration in the past, present and future. The Museum cherishes and preserves history and does so on the basis of the personal stories of migrants - connecting their life stories with current social issues through recognisable themes.



In the visit, BHKS members were inspired to appreciate the arts, culture, and history presented through the Museum's exhibitions.

Visit to Huyghe Brewery

5 March 2025



The BHKS organised a visit to the Huyghe Brewery on 05 March 2025, including a guided tour of the premises, engaging discussion with CEO Mr. Alain De Laet, and ending with a tasting session of their renowned beers.

Founded in 1902, the Huyghe Brewery has garnered worldwide acclaim, particularly for its iconic *Delirium Tremens*, recognized by its signature pink elephant logo. This visit provided an exceptional opportunity to explore the brewery's rich history and innovative brewing techniques that have stood the test of time.



During our visit, Mr. De Laet shared insights into the Huyghe Brewery's commercial strategy in Asia. With a special focus on Hong Kong and China, the discussion shed light on how one of Belgium's oldest breweries continues to expand its global footprint.





Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival Antwerp 2025

10 May 2025

On 10 May 2025, over 7,000 spectators and paddlers gathered in the beautiful Kattendijkdok of the City of Antwerp for the 11th Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival, one of the city's most popular annual events.

Organised by Rotary Antwerp International and Rotary Antwerp West, the festival brought together some 30 dragon boat teams for a full day of spirited racing, cultural exchanges, and community celebrations. The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Brussels was the event's title sponsor.

The KU Leuven team was once again proudly sponsored by the BHKS Education Fund to support cultural exchange between Hong Kong and Belgium. BHKS members were also invited to join the race in the "Hong Kong Dragons" team with family and friends.

Proceeds from the event supported local and global charities, including Thomas Houses and Mercy Ships, adding a meaningful dimension to the festivities.



BHKS 2025 End of Summer Event – The Port of Antwerp-Bruges

16 September 2025

The BHKS held the flagship End of Summer Business Event 2025 on the topic of - **The Port of Antwerp-Bruges, a dynamic port with global ambitions** – at the Port of Antwerp-Bruges on 16 September 2025.

We were honoured to have the International Trade Networks Manager, **Mr Patrick Van Cauwenberghe**, as our keynote speaker for the evening.

Heading the second largest port in the European continent, The Port Authority of Antwerp-Bruges is responsible not only for providing 5% of Belgium's GDP, but also stands as the largest Belgian employer by number of employed workers and staff.



Programme

- 6.00 pm** Registration and welcome drinks

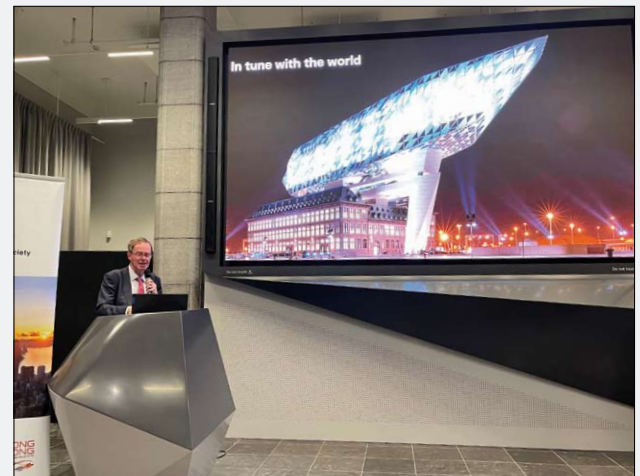
- 6.30 pm** Welcoming Remarks - Alexander De Beir, Chairman of the BHKS, and Chris Lo, Regional Director for Europe, Central Asia & Israel at the Hong Kong Trade Development Council

- 6.40 pm** Keynote Presentation - Patrick Van Cauwenberghe, International Trade Networks Manager of the Port of Antwerp-Bruges

- 7.20 pm** Q&A - Hans De Backer, Vice Chairman of the BHKS, and Paula Kant, Head of Investment Promotion at InvestHK

- 7.40 pm** Walking Dinner

- 9.30 pm** End of the evening



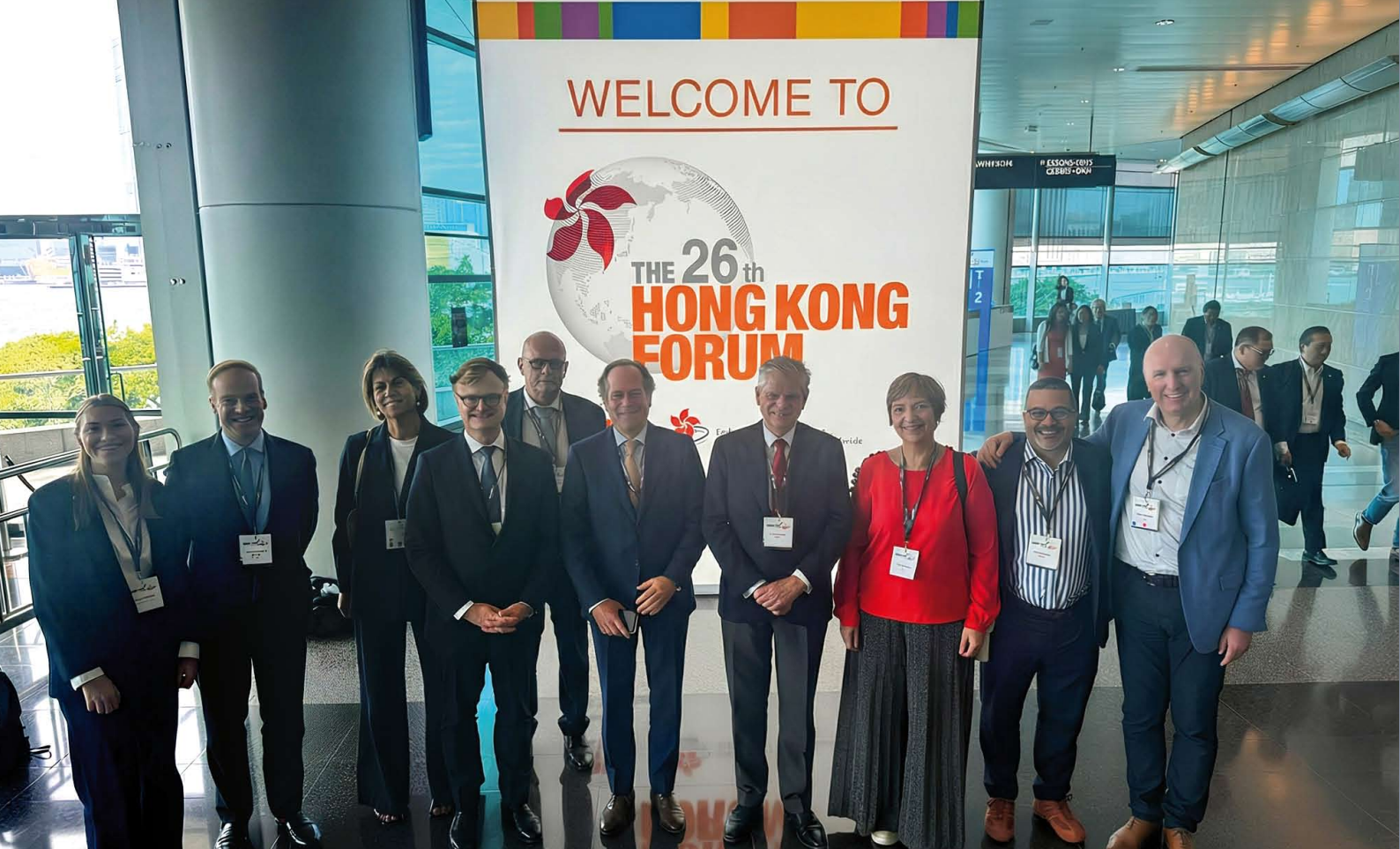
Event Details

- Date** 16 September 2025

- Venue** Port Authority of Port of Antwerp-Bruges

- Address** Zaha Hadidplein 1, 2030 Antwerp

The breadth of the Port's economic activities, as well as its embrace of innovative technologies, such as AI and piloted drones, and planned advancements towards a greener, more sustainable, and more efficient Belgian logistics corridor, inspired the over 130 BHKS members and guests who attended the event.



Takeaways from the Chairman's trip to the 2025 Hong Kong Forum

During the first week of December, I led a BHKS delegation to Hong Kong. The year that has just ended has not been particularly encouraging for those who advocate a free and open economy. 2025 was marked by one keyword: tariffs. Faced with the temptation of isolationism in the world's largest economy, it is more interesting and useful than ever for us Europeans, who tend to forget our place in the top three economies, to go and observe what is happening in Asia. As the hub of a rapidly developing economy, Hong Kong and Shenzhen, located barely 17 minutes from each other, already give us a fairly accurate picture of how business will be organised in the future. Present at the Hong Kong Forum last December, I was able to draw some lessons that should inspire us rather than frighten us. Here are the main ones:

1

Attracting new talents

Through its Top Talent Pass scheme, this major economic hub sends a clear message to students from the 100 best universities in the world, including Ghent and Leuven, by welcoming them without a visa for a period of 2 to 3 years, depending on their experience and profiles, so that they can start or pursue a professional career there.

2

From cross-border synergy to a super connector

The Chinese economic metropolis of Shenzhen and Hong Kong are already showing us that by crossing borders, we can create hubs that will stand out in the coming centuries, both through their infrastructure, their architecture, their layout for future start-ups and investors, and through the presence of talent. The development of AI there is simply phenomenal. The region has developed into a super connector to international markets that foster mutual growth.

3

Hong Kong, world champion of IPOs

It is the stock market with the most IPOs in 2025, proof that the region is bubbling with ambitions and attracting investors from all over the world.

4

Also a cultural haven

The M+ building in West Kowloon is one of the largest museums of modern and contemporary visual culture in the world. Local authorities are perfectly aware of the unifying role of culture in bringing people, and their economies, closer together.

5

Inspiring local AND European personalities

The list would be too long to name all the people who have instilled their overflowing enthusiasm in me. I will mention only two: Sophia Chong, Executive Director of Hong Kong Trade Development Council, and David Lomastro, Consul General of Belgium in Hong Kong, initiator, among others, of the annual “Belgian Days”, a multi-day cultural festival in November showcasing Belgian art, food, music, and film through various events and experiences across Hong Kong and Macau, celebrating East-meets-West.

6

Fertile soil for the self-employed and Interim Managers

Finally, I discovered not only that the status of self-employed does exist in Hong Kong, but, above all, that Chinese companies (and others) that settle in this city of more than 7 million inhabitants come here to develop all over the world. In the decades to come, there will therefore be a multitude of projects and functions for Interim Managers who will be able to play an essential role as an intermediary pivot to other world economies. As ADM Interim Management, we play an active role in this, with a local partner, thus helping to bring Asian and European companies closer together.

Whatever some may think, the world is constantly opening up. Let's be part of it!





More information on Hong Kong's 2025 Policy Address can be found at: <https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2025/en/policy.html> or by scanning this QR code

The Latest Policies of Hong Kong to Promote Pillar Industries: Insights from the Chief Executive's 2025 Policy Address

Hong Kong's 2025 Policy Address, titled "Deepening Reforms for Our People, Leveraging Our Strengths for a Brighter Future", marks a critical step in the city's economic transformation. The address highlights the government's commitment to enhancing Hong Kong's competitiveness through innovation and technology (I&T), setting a clear roadmap for economic growth, development, and improving the livelihood of its people. With a strong emphasis on diversifying Hong Kong's economic pillars and capitalising on its strengths, the 2025 Policy Address outlines a vision for a vibrant, dynamic, and future-proof economy.

Economic Transformation and the Northern Metropolis

A central focus of the 2025 Policy Address is the accelerated development of the Northern Metropolis, which is envisioned as Hong Kong's new economic engine. This new urban hub will serve as a catalyst for growth, supporting high-tech industries, research and development (R&D), and new infrastructure projects. To expedite this

development, the government plans to introduce dedicated legislation aimed at streamlining statutory procedures and facilitating quicker development processes. These efforts are aimed at reinforcing Hong Kong's role as a key business and financial centre, while positioning it as a hub for innovation and technology.

Industry Development and Reform: Expanding Hong Kong's Industrial Base

In an effort to further diversify its economy, Hong Kong will focus on attracting new industries through the formulation of preferential policy packages designed to make Hong Kong an attractive location for businesses. Specific industries targeted for development include aircraft recycling, new energy, and life and health technologies. The government will also establish the Hong Kong Centre for Medical Products Regulation, which will facilitate the commercialisation of pharmaceuticals and support the growth of innovative healthcare companies.

A significant part of the plan also involves the promotion of AI and data science industries. Hong Kong will expand the application of AI across government services and business operations, while also investing in R&D initiatives aimed at strengthening the region's AI ecosystem. These industries are expected to become central drivers of Hong Kong's future growth, enabling it to remain competitive in the global economy.

Consolidating Hong Kong's Role as an International Financial and Trade Centre

The 2025 Policy Address outlines a range of measures to consolidate and expand Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre. Among the key initiatives are efforts to shorten the stock settlement cycle to T+1, support the return of China Concept Stocks, and introduce a central clearing system for gold. These initiatives are designed to enhance Hong Kong's capital markets, making them more efficient and attractive to global investors.

Further, Hong Kong plans to introduce a new Renminbi (RMB) Business Facility to support the use of RMB in the real economy and introduce

legislative proposals to regulate digital assets. This is part of Hong Kong's broader strategy to integrate with mainland China's financial system, ensuring the region continues to serve as a vital gateway for global capital flows.

In terms of international trade, Hong Kong will explore new investment agreements with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Peru, while also expanding its Economic and Trade Offices in regions like Latin America and Central Asia. This expansion is aimed at strengthening Hong Kong's position as a global trade hub and fostering long-term strategic partnerships.



International Shipping and Aviation: Expanding Hong Kong's Transport and Logistics Networks

Hong Kong remains committed to maintaining its status as a premier international shipping centre. To this end, the government plans to establish a comprehensive "rail-sea-land-river" transport network, which will facilitate the movement of goods from mainland China to international markets through Hong Kong. Additionally, efforts will be made to drive the development of high-value maritime services, ensuring that Hong Kong continues to lead in the global shipping industry.

On the aviation front, the government will expand the Airport City development, focusing on the construction of the AsiaWorld-Expo Phase 2 and the development of yacht bays. This expansion aims to enhance Hong Kong's position as an international aviation hub by improving capacity and supporting the growth of global aviation services.

Talent Development and Education: Building the Workforce of the Future

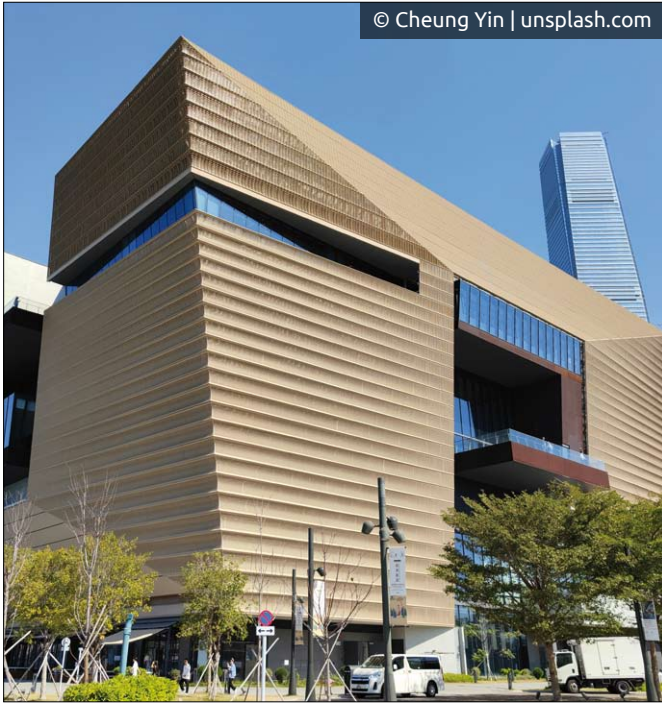
The 2025 Policy Address places significant emphasis on talent attraction and education to ensure Hong Kong can build a world-class workforce. Hong Kong aims to enhance its position as an international education hub by increasing the number of places for non-local students and improving accommodation for international students. The policy also highlights the importance of attracting research talent to advance key sectors, such as sustainable development, energy, advanced manufacturing, and materials through the InnoHK research cluster.

Moreover, the government will promote the development of a low-altitude economy ecosystem, which focuses on the growth of drone technologies and other innovative applications. To further support talent development, Hong Kong will launch the “Young Talent Training Programme”, offering young people opportunities to participate in international internships and conferences, fostering the next generation of global leaders.

Enhancing Cultural, Sports, and Tourism Development

In a bid to strengthen its cultural and tourism sectors, the government plans to develop a premium arts trading hub, building on Hong Kong’s collaboration with major art events such as Art Basel. Hong Kong will further solidify its position as a cultural destination by expanding its yacht tourism infrastructure and establishing the WestK Academy, which will offer professional training in the arts. Hong Kong is also entering a multi-year partnership with the LIV Golf tour, aiming to attract top-tier golfers to compete in the region.

To support local businesses, the government will earmark an additional EUR 3.3 billion for infrastructure projects, including construction and SME support, ensuring that Hong Kong’s local economy remains resilient and competitive.



Conclusion: A Roadmap for a Stronger, Diversified Economy

The 2025 Policy Address represents a bold vision for Hong Kong’s future, with clear strategies to promote pillar industries such as AI, health technologies, advanced manufacturing, and digital transformation. By enhancing its financial, trade, and shipping services, and attracting global talent, Hong Kong is poised to secure its

position as a leading global business hub in the 21st century. With a focus on research, innovation, and industry development, Hong Kong is not only committed to diversifying its economy, but also ensuring that it remains resilient in an ever-changing global landscape.

A New Year to Deepen Ties Between Belgium and Hong Kong

Contact : frankfurt.office@hktdc.org | +49-69-95772-0

The year 2026 marks an exceptional moment in the longstanding relationship between Belgium and Hong Kong. It is the year the Hong Kong Trade Development Council celebrates its 60th anniversary, the Consulate of Belgium in Hong Kong commemorates a century since its establishment, and the Belgium-Hong Kong Society reaches its 50-year milestone. Taken together, these anniversaries reflect not only on decades of partnership built on combined efforts, vibrant entrepreneurship, and collaborative exchange, but also the long-standing commercial, cultural, and interpersonal ties that have steadily shaped the relationship between Belgium and Hong Kong.



Queen Mathilde at Business of Design Week 2013

From these foundations emerges a rich history of friendship, marked by high-level visits, design and cultural showcases, and expanding trade networks that have steadily strengthened the relationship between Belgium and Hong Kong. A defining moment came with Queen Mathilde's visit, when she inaugurated Belgium as partner country at Hong Kong's Business of Design Week in 2013, highlighting the depth of creative

collaboration between our communities. This spirit of exchange has flourished because Hong Kong offers something unique: a dynamic, reliable, and internationally connected hub thriving with innovation and ideas. For Belgian companies — from innovative SMEs to global exporters — its stable regulatory environment, world-class logistics, and vibrant business ecosystem continue to provide an ideal platform for growth.



HKTD Food Expo 2025

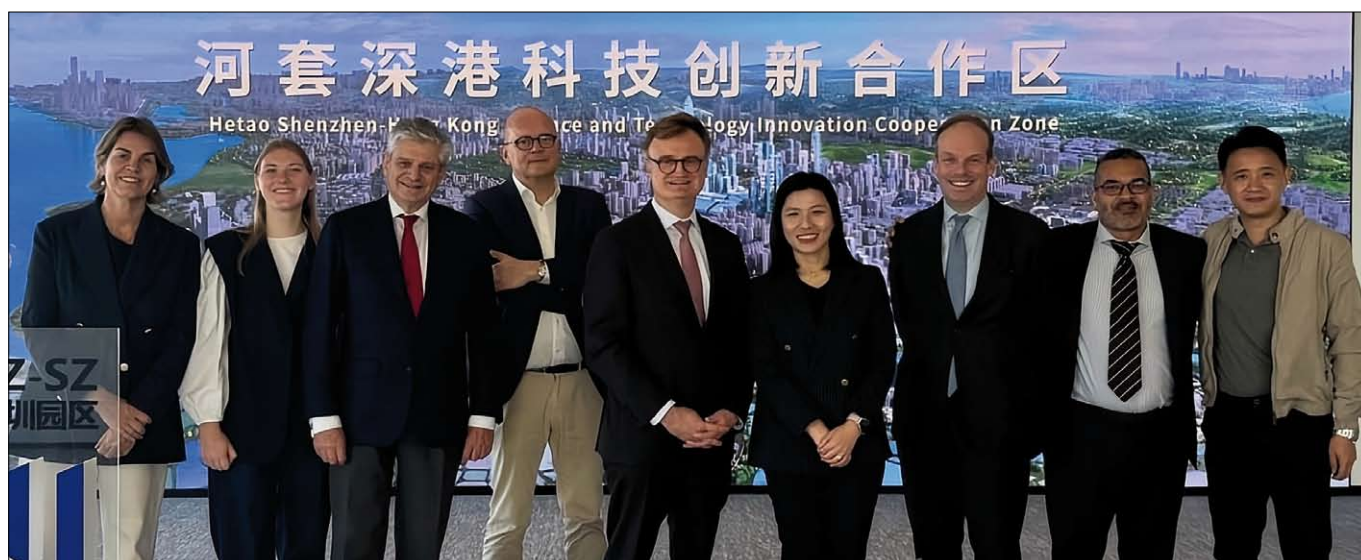
Economically, the partnership stands on strong foundations. Diamonds and precious stones remain Belgium's top exports to Hong Kong, while imports into Belgium include electronics, machinery, and a wide range of high-value consumer goods. These flows reflect a deep-rooted commercial complementarity: Belgium's strengths in advanced manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and the diamond trade meeting Hong Kong's role as Asia's premier distribution and re-export centre. It is precisely this alignment that makes Hong Kong's major trade events — organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council — so relevant for Belgian



HKTDC Medical and Healthcare Fair

companies. Flagship fairs such as the Hong Kong International Jewellery Show and the Hong Kong International Diamond, Gem & Pearl Show rank among the world's leading marketplaces for jewellery, gems, and luxury products, offering Belgian firms unparalleled visibility and access to Asian buyers and partners. In parallel, the Hong Kong International Medical and Healthcare Fair provides life-sciences, MedTech, and pharmaceutical companies with a powerful gateway to the wider Asian market. By bringing together hundreds of exhibitors and industry professionals, the fair showcases cutting-edge biotechnology, medical devices, and healthcare solutions, while creating concrete opportunities for partnerships and cross-border collaboration that extend well beyond the exhibition halls.

Together, these historical ties, thriving economic links, and forward-looking business platforms create a momentum we are eager to build upon. As we celebrate the anniversaries that mark our shared journey, Hong Kong looks forward to deepening its engagement with Belgium — ensuring that our relationship not only remains strong, but continues to grow, innovate, and inspire in the decades ahead. Therefore, as the Hong Kong Trade Development Council's trade promotion body in the region, HKTDC Frankfurt stands ready as a trusted partner for Belgian and Benelux markets. Businesses, institutions, and innovators in Belgium are warmly invited to contact us if they wish to explore collaboration opportunities with Hong Kong.



Delegation from Belgium in Shenzhen for Hong Kong Forum 2025

Belgians in Hong Kong

Interview with David Lomastro

David Lomastro
Consul General of Belgium in Hong Kong



You have been Consul General of Belgium in Hong Kong for more than three years, what is your general feeling after these three years?

David Lomastro (DL): “If we talk about the general feeling, I would say that living in Hong Kong allows you to see the main global trends taking shape. What we refer to by the very general term of “geopolitics” and an increased form of uncertainty are affecting the economic sphere and therefore the lives of citizens across the globe. When you live in Europe, it is impossible to ignore the war in Ukraine, as our countries have welcomed numerous refugees and solidarity in the face of Russian aggression is as much a necessity, a moral duty as it is a challenge. The Middle East has been and continues to be affected by the aftermath of

the 7 October attacks in Israel, relations between the United States and China have a global impact, etc.

In Hong Kong, these various developments also have repercussions on several levels, as the city remains a bridge, a link between Asia, China and the rest of the world. Not to mention that it is also one of the world’s major financial, commercial and logistics centres, with all that this implies in terms of flows and exchanges. Working here as a diplomat is therefore a fascinating experience. It’s a fast-moving environment that immerses you in world affairs more than other places.”

Were you surprised by the professional, economic and cultural context in relation to your expectations?

DL: “As I had never travelled to Asia before, I had no particular expectations and really wanted to come with an open mind. I imagined a competitive business environment, a place where I could better understand certain aspects of the global economy and China in general. In this respect, I have not been disappointed. Every week, I learn more about the relations between Europe and China.

of the stakeholders. It is therefore best to be prepared with a clear idea of the projects you want to see accomplished.

The speed and ease of making contacts here is remarkable. Whether with companies, chambers of commerce, clubs or authorities, exchanges are very simple to set up. But perhaps more than elsewhere, time is limited and contacts are very results-oriented and focused on the interests

Like most newcomers, I was very pleasantly surprised by the city’s natural beauty. The magnificent landscapes, mountains, forests and beaches so close to this extremely intense urban environment were a wonderful surprise for my family and me. All this contributes greatly to the quality of life and attractiveness of Hong Kong. Not to mention the food: you can enjoy delicacies from all over the world, often of very high quality and for all budgets. I quickly became a fan of Cantonese cuisine.”

What are the main lessons you have learned from working there and the sources of inspiration for your compatriots and Europeans in general?

DL: “What we are seeing at the moment is that Belgian companies already present in Hong Kong continue to thrive and intend to stay. However, in recent years, there has been little new prospecting. As I said, Hong Kong is a place and a market in constant evolution. The companies that succeed are those that can adapt quickly, innovate and take into account changes and new trends (such as digitalisation or sustainability expectations). The city is more closely linked to mainland China. The exceptional rebound of the local stock market in 2025 is strikingly illustrative of this, as it is mainly due to Chinese companies. This presents new opportunities but also new risks.

For Belgian companies, this means remaining flexible in their investment and establishment strategies. It is important to stay informed and build

partnerships. Because in Hong Kong, as everywhere else, opportunities often arise from encounters.

That is why we invest time and energy in creating opportunities to forge links. This is done in a targeted manner for the business world, in close collaboration with the Belgium-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce, such as during business seminars organised on ESG financial regulation, life sciences, the latest developments in the entertainment sector in Macao, or the Sustainability Conference organised with the University of Hong Kong last November. But it is also done by creating a favourable environment for networking and more informal exchanges that showcase the best our country has to offer. This is an opportunity for us to show that Belgium and Belgians are open to cooperation, innovation, and diversity.”

Can you tell us more about the interest of our compatriots in Hong Kong? How many Belgians stay there, whether for professional or private reasons or to study? Their general feeling?

DL: “There are more than 1 300 Belgians registered at the Consulate, and undoubtedly several hundreds more living in Hong Kong. This is the third largest Belgian community in Asia. To give an idea of the scale, there are more Belgians in Hong Kong than in the rest of China. This means that Hong Kong remains a truly attractive place for our fellow citizens.

When I arrived in 2022, I was struck by the huge potential of this community. They are open-minded, professionally active people who often engage in other passions such as sport, art or social activities. It is a pool of talent and energy that we wanted to tap into, especially as there was a desire to get

together again after the Covid crisis. Thanks to the triangle formed by the Consulate, the Chamber and the Belgian Club, we were able to make use of this human capital. First, to identify creative ways to put Belgium back on the map in Hong Kong, but also, and above all, to strengthen existing ties and create new ones. We were also convinced that the best way to act in a polarised geopolitical context was to focus on people-to-people relations by inviting Belgian opinion leaders, artists and craftsmen to Hong Kong.

With the help of a few Belgian and Hong Kong partners, this led to the launch of the ‘Belgian Days’ concept, which we have now been organising for three years





in Hong Kong and two years in Macao. These are ten intense days of economic, cultural and gastronomic activities that provide opportunities for exchange. More and more Belgians who regularly visit Hong Kong are making sure their visits coincide with these events. The resumption of direct flights between Brussels and Hong Kong, thanks to Cathay Pacific is a very positive factor in this regard. Guests from Belgium then share their experiences with their own networks back home, sparking new interest in discovering Hong Kong and Macao. Nowadays, I believe that no government advertising campaign can match the impact of those messages from civil society.

There are also dozens of Belgian students who take advantage of exchange programs between Belgian and Hong Kong universities to spend a semester in Hong Kong each year. Around 20 Belgian professors teach at local universities. Academic cooperation has continued over the last few years, and 2026 will undoubtedly mark a new turning point, as, in coordination with the Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad and Wallonie-Bruxelles International, we will welcome representatives from around ten Belgian universities to Hong Kong in February for the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education Conference."

How do you see the professional future of Hong Kong and its advantages for the Belgian business world?

DL: "Hong Kong still enjoys advantages that make it unique within China: economic freedom, the use of English, a legal system based on common law and a pro-business environment. These factors tend to reassure European and Belgian companies, including regarding dispute resolution and intellectual property protection. In terms of logistics, Hong Kong also has assets such as its international port and a highly connected airport. It is an efficient platform for trade with Asia and China.

What makes Hong Kong special and attractive is its proximity to China, but with its own unique characteristics through the principle of 'One country, Two systems'. Some believe that the city is destined to become 'just another Chinese city'. The best way to counter this is to preserve as much as possible the structural elements such as the teaching and promotion of English and foreign languages, openness, the independence of the courts and tribunals, freedoms, diversity and

inclusiveness. In short, the international character of the Special Administrative Region.

Belgium is keen to contribute to the city's uniqueness. The 'One country, Two systems' principle naturally depends on the relations between Hong Kong and mainland China. But it also depends on how Hong Kong interacts with the rest of the world and how the rest of the world – including us Europeans – interacts with Hong Kong. That is why, through initiatives that facilitate people-to-people contacts, we hope to contribute to better mutual understanding and the creation of new links and opportunities.

2026 will be a key year, as the fourth edition of the 'Belgian Days' will mark the centenary of the opening of the Belgian Consulate General in Hong Kong in 1926. I invite friends of Hong Kong in Belgium to reach out and see what we can do together to mark this historic anniversary."

Interview with Mathieu Thys

Hi there, my name is Mathieu Thys. I'm in my early 30s and living for 7 years and counting in Hong Kong. After enrolling on a traineeship at a shipping company in my hometown Antwerp, I quickly realised Antwerp was only a drop in the world's ocean (a rare admission coming from someone from Antwerp), and, triggered by the globalisation, I decided to look for an international opportunity myself instead of just travelling. Harder said than done. Where to begin? I found out networking would be key to success. I started talking to everyone about my dream to move abroad. Sending CVs and motivational letters became a daily routine. At home we were always taught "you reap what you sow". Following this motto, I sowed a lot. After a long and time-consuming process, I had a few options to choose from. Research learned the Far East would be the better choice. More professional opportunities and eye-opening experiences ahead. I moved in 2018 as a lobbyist for Ethiopian Airlines, switched to the scale-up Gimber during Covid launching their business in Asia, and ended up working for Biscuiterie Jules Destrooper today, overseeing the business in the APAC region.



Mathieu Thys
My Whatsapp +32484147437

What were your first impressions when you arrived in the city?

After a turbulent flight to Hong Kong, my wife and I arrived at the start of the wet season. I remember my wife disliking her curly, frizzy hair and our tiny 200sq ft apartment, but, on the other hand, loving the active vibe in Tsim Sha Tsui, where we were first stationed. It was an overwhelming sensory

welcome! The biggest surprise, however, was the wilderness: I never

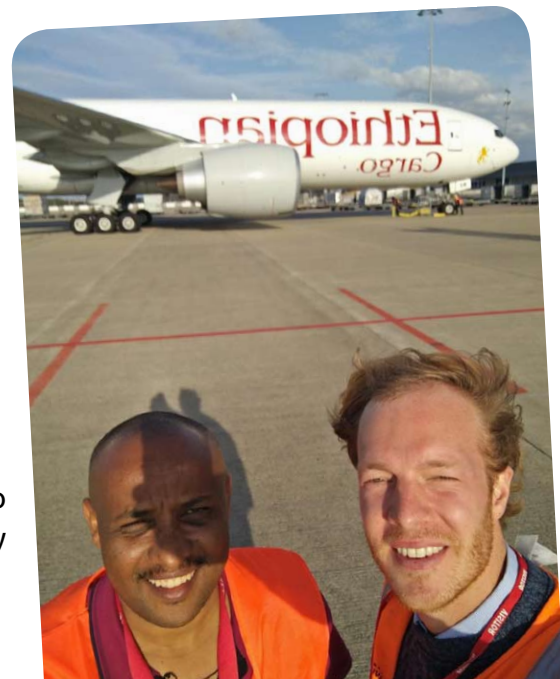
imagined that the world's densest city could cradle such lush hills, secret waterfalls, and stunning coastal land. Between the many hidden gems and the incredible food on every corner, I knew I was somewhere truly amazing.

Can you share a funny or unexpected encounter you've had with locals?

Many were experienced and most of them can be shared. In Asia, employees are allowed to sleep at the office. In most offices, employees bring out their pillows during lunch time and take a nap behind their desks. At our office at Ethiopian Airlines, we always had to book our meeting rooms in advance. One day, I booked the meeting room right after lunch, as I had an important customer paying us a visit. I only arrived with the customer at the meeting room at 2pm sharp, without preparing the room in advance. A rookie mistake! When we opened the door and turned on the light, we were all surprised to see a few employees taking a nap on the meeting table with the shutters down. Luckily, my customer and I had a good laugh and the ice for the meeting was broken.

How did you adapt to Hong Kong's famously fast-paced lifestyle?

By analogy with the movie "yes man", I decided to say yes to everything for the first couple of months. We had an extremely



busy and expensive first month, but we were immediately fully immersed in the Hong Kong lifestyle. Luckily, I thrive on variety. Young, full of energy and ambition and a couple of newly made very good friends who showed me the way was all I needed to get going. Hong Kong's pace is perfectly matched by its legendary convenience. The city never sleeps; if you need something at 3 a.m. on a Sunday, a 7-Eleven around the corner has you covered. It's engineered for momentum.



How did you go about building a network and finding support or mentorship?

The best and easiest way to build a network, in my humble opinion, is to play a team sport and join a local team. Secondly, the Belgian community here is small but mighty – ambitious, down-to-earth and very open. Hong Kong, with its countless coffee shops, is designed for casual first meetings. Then, there are associations such as the Belgian Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the FIT and the Belgian Consulate, who regularly bring together all Belgians scattered around Hong Kong. Beyond formal networks, there's a WhatsApp group for everything; everyone finds their tribe here.



What is your favourite local dish, and where would you tell newcomers to try it?

Hong Kong is a maze of Michelin-starred restaurants and new concepts popping up daily. But as a sweet-toothed Belgian, I adore the egg waffle, or “*Gai Dan Jaa*” (雞蛋仔). Skip the chains; seek out artisanal stalls. My favourite is 629 Egg Waffle in San Po Kong – it's sublime, and it also comes with the blunt and almost rude service!



What is a key lesson you've learned as a young entrepreneur in such a competitive city?

To build and sustain a genuine network. In many Asian business cultures, you don't advance by being the loudest in the room. You advance through respectful persistence, quiet competence and a genuine openness to learn. It's about humble ambition.

What are some hidden gems in the city that you think people often overlook?

You can find hidden gems in the smallest corners, but it's the incredible nature that truly stands out. Most overlook that about 75% of Hong Kong is open countryside and roughly 40% of it is designated as country parks and special areas for conservation. We live vertically to preserve that. Within minutes, you can swap the financial district for a mountain hike or a beach. For me, Hong Kong is the “city of contrasts”: ancient temples against skyscrapers, colonial architecture beside futuristic malls, a blend of all sorts of people, an urban jungle where jungle prevails.



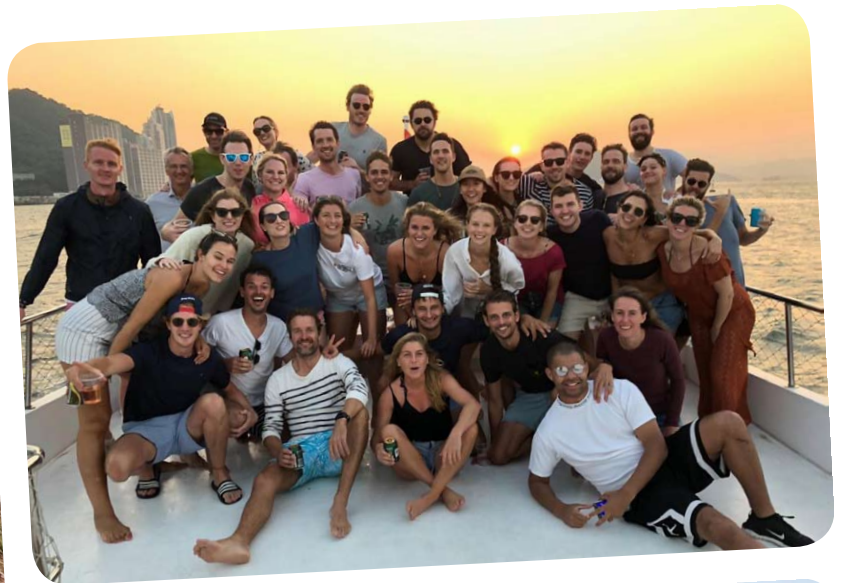
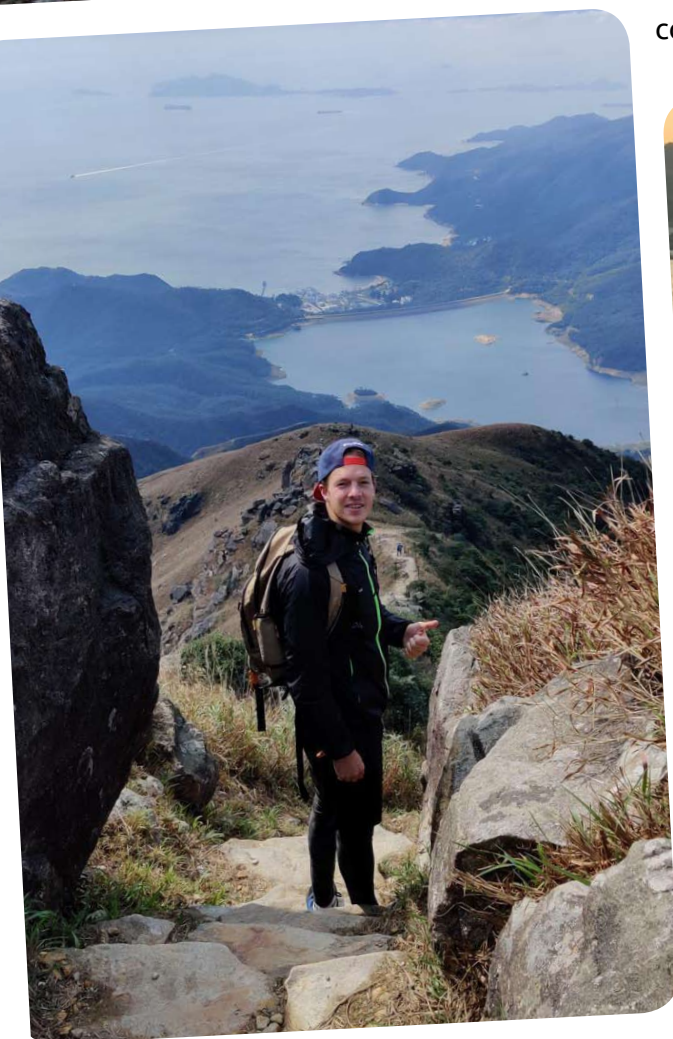


What advice would you give someone considering a move to Hong Kong?

Buy a one-way ticket and take the leap. Hong Kong is transformative. When you arrive, embrace it all – the intense climate, the hard working and warm-hearted people, the stunning natural backdrops to urban chaos. Say ‘yes’ to every invite: a post-work night hike, a weekend junk party, a coffee with a stranger. Your entire life here will be built on those spontaneous “yesses.”

What are your plans and ambitions for the coming years in Hong Kong?

Living abroad made me even more proud of our little Belgium. Yes, even with all its flaws. Moving forward, it’s clear I want to help Belgian companies build their presence across the globe. At the moment, I’m building the presence in APAC for one of the best biscuit companies in the world. With a new CEO on board, I’m eager to go full speed ahead. Even though I love Hong Kong and it will always be my second home, I go where the work and professional opportunities bring me. Time will tell if I’m here to stay. We recently welcomed a new member to our tribe. Hong Kong will always be special for him as well, no matter when and where we move. This city has given me a global perspective, a resilient spirit and an incredible network. I’m here to build and create for now. If you’re ever in Hong Kong, don’t hesitate to drop me a line. I’m always open to connect over a coffee or a hike.



Interview with Elise De Witte

A Belgian Student in Hong Kong



Elise De Witte (EDW) is from Ghent and in the third year of her Bachelor in Applied Economics programme at KU Leuven. Before that, she graduated from high school with a degree in economics and sciences at the Sint-Barbaracollege in Ghent. In the first semester of her third year, she left on an exchange to the City University (i.e. "CityU") in Hong Kong.

BHKS: Why did you decide to go study in Hong Kong?

EDW: "I definitely wanted to go on an exchange and I was hesitating about the destination. In the end, I came to the conclusion that the opportunity to study outside of Europe would not come back anytime soon. Asia appealed to me because it is an economic engine and a growing political centre in the world market. Since I had only been to Asia once, Hong Kong seemed like the perfect opportunity to discover this continent. When I saw Hong Kong, I also got the feeling it was an Asian city with a lot of Western influences. Moreover, I had also heard a lot of positive feedback about the city, which increased my interest. My choice was made to put Hong Kong as my first choice for an exchange semester."

BHKS: What do you currently study in Hong Kong?

EDW: "In the first semester of the third bachelor's year in Applied Economics at KU Leuven, you are given the option to go on Erasmus, within Europe, or on exchange, outside Europe. I studied for six months at the City University in Hong Kong as part of my studies at KU Leuven. My majors in my third year are finance & accountancy and production & logistics. KU Leuven also gave me the option to take an elective course at CityU, which I filled with the course 'Intro to Financial Markets'."

BHKS: What has surprised you the most so far?

EDW: "Hong Kong has completely exceeded my expectations. The combination of the metropolis with the nearby mountains and beaches makes Hong Kong a unique place. The city has a lot to offer: you can mingle in the busy city, but you can also quickly escape the chaos

by taking a hike or spending a day at the beach. There is a nice mix between local restaurants and more upscale places. In addition, I am also surprised by the mixing between the east and the west. Everything is always well marked in English and Cantonese. Moreover, more



and more Mandarin Chinese is coming up, for example, the announcements in the metro are always in the three languages. Hong Kong is also a very accessible city and it goes smoothly to integrate there. You can also easily find your way around the metropolis thanks to the readable metro network that quickly takes you around the city.

Another fascinating aspect of Hong Kong is its internationality. At City University, for example, there are already many Asian students who are doing their bachelor's in Hong Kong. In addition, CityU is also strongly committed to exchanges, creating an interesting mix of students."

BHKS: Which aspects of Hong Kong are already real sources of inspiration for you? What do you see/feel on the spot that we could certainly use in Belgium, in terms of mindset, creativity, etc.?

EDW: "In Hong Kong, when there are crowded events, the city ensures good organisation. The Hongkongers stand in line in a disciplined manner every time and are patient. For public transport, there are always indications about where everyone should stand so that peak hours are well absorbed. In addition, there is a general rule that one must stand on the right side of the escalators so that there is a smooth passage on the left. Each person strictly follows these guidelines, which means that there is a structured hustle and bustle. These simple guidelines already make for a much more efficient city. Another positive aspect is the cleanliness of the metropolis. It is unbelievable how they keep a busy inhabited area so clean. Hong Kong also has many old buildings and

neighbourhoods, but the streets are always waste-free. One of the biggest pluses is Hong Kong's security. Personally, I have never felt unsafe there. Usually there is always life on the street so you never feel alone.

The Hong Kong mindset is much more progressive. City University, for example, is committed to innovation. They are currently working with Shenzhen on a site for innovation in technology. This is located in Shenzhen, which is only 30 kilometres from the centre of Hong Kong. Sporting motivation is also higher among the Hong Kong population. In parks you see many elderly people who come together to exercise in groups and stimulate each other."

BHKS: Would you recommend other Belgian students and/or entrepreneurs to come to Hong Kong?

EDW: "I would recommend an experience in Hong Kong to anyone. It is very enriching for students, because there are several universities and many international exchange students. Hong Kong is also very centrally-located for travel in Asia. You can be in Asian cities as well as at a paradisiacal destination within a three-hour flight. I had the opportunity to discover Seoul, Beijing, Tokyo, Macau and Taipei in four months. Due to the smooth network of high-speed trains, I was also able to visit

Shenzhen and Guilin in China. Shenzhen is only 17 minutes from Hong Kong. Hong Kong also has a lot to offer professionally because it is a financial centre. They want to focus on strong connections between China and the rest of the world, making it a very important anchor point. I am very grateful for the opportunity I was given to study there. It was a fantastic period in Hong Kong and I hope I can go back there soon."

BHKS Education Fund

Established in 2010, the BHKS Education Fund sponsors the exchange activities of young people between Belgium and Hong Kong with the goal to promote stronger and more sustainable ties. The most prominent project of the BHKS Education Fund in 2025 was undoubtedly the sponsoring of the KU Leuven dragon boat team in the 11th Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival Antwerp.

Board members make a big splash in the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival



On Saturday 10 May, the Hong Kong Economic & Trade Office (HKETO) once again joined forces with the Belgium Hong Kong Society (BHKS) to form a great team at the occasion of the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival in Antwerp.

Not to win the gold medal but rather... to participate with an Olympic Spirit.

It has become a tradition that a HKETO x BHKS dragon boat participates in this social, cultural, family and team-building event with big enthusiasm.

For the first time in history, three of our BHKS Board members participated: Chairman Alexander De Beir, Vice-Chairman Hans De Backer and Director Paul Melkebeke.

The team showcased an almost perfect synchronisation of paddle movements.

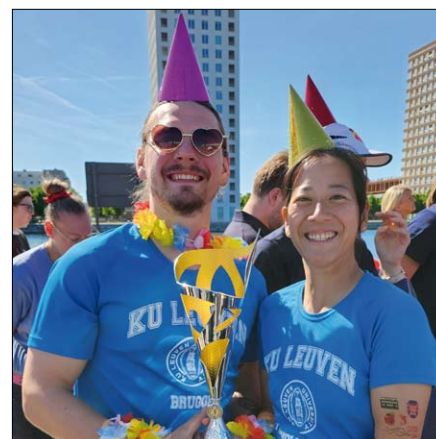
We look forward to participating again next year!



Participation of KU Leuven

2025 is the second year in a row that our KU Leuven team participated in the Dragon Boat Festival in Antwerp, and that is all thanks to our sponsor, the Belgium-Hong Kong Society. Thanks to their Education Fund, we could register a team of 16 paddlers and one drummer. This tradition is

not only a great team-building experience, but also an opportunity to connect with people and learn about Hong Kong culture. We learned about the tradition of eating 'zongzi', sticky rice wrapped in bamboo leaves, which is especially popular during the dragon boat festival.



Since it was KU Leuven's 600th birthday and two of our paddlers' birthdays (May 9 and 10), we decided to have a birthday party as our theme. We wore party hats, blew trumpets and had cake. Our slogan was: Hip hip hip. Hoera!



We took home the trophy for best university thanks to our training sessions. We spent many afternoons on the waters in Ghent practicing our pace and building muscles using canoes. Our motivation? Enjoying beautiful sunsets on the canals and eating Belgian fries!

Even after competing in the Dragon Boat Race, we kept paddling on the water throughout the summer. Not only do we enjoy the exercise and relaxation on the water, but we have also become a tight group of friends!



Applications for the BHKS Education Fund

The BHKS Education Fund aims to support the following projects:

- a** a) Short-term academic, cultural, technology or sports exchange programmes between Belgium and Hong Kong
- b** b) Other projects to enhance and promote intercultural activities related to Belgium and Hong Kong
- c** c) Work or study experience that connects Belgium and Hong Kong

Proposed projects can be either "tangible" or web-based, and must be non-profit-making.

Applications can be submitted through the applicant's college / university / tertiary institution (including student associations), or individually for applicants no longer in full-time education. The completed application form (available on BHKS' website: <http://www.bhks.be>), together with the application's supporting documents, should be submitted to the BHKS Secretariat. Once submitted, applications are vetted by the Board of the BHKS and applicants will be informed of the outcome within three months following receipt of the application. Interested applicants may visit our website or contact the Secretariat directly for more information.

Applications are open throughout the year.

Applications to become BHKS Members

As a member, you enjoy privileged networking opportunities, first-hand information on Hong Kong and the region, and other benefits. Membership is valid for one year, renewed annually at a fee based on our three membership categories: "individual", "corporate" and "young/retiree". We kindly ask those interested in joining to contact the Secretariat directly. We would be delighted to welcome you alongside us at our future events!



Details can be found at:

<https://www.bhks.be/pg-become-a-member-9.html>

or by scanning the QR code.

Structural Partners



BHKS - NEWSLETTER #18 - SPRING 2026

Editor : The BHKS Secretariat

The BHKS Secretariat

Address: Rue d'Arlon 118,

1040 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32(0)27 75 00 88

E-mail: info@bhks.be

Website: <https://www.bhks.be>

