



Esteri - The important role played by the Italian Trade Commission in promoting Made in Italy in Thailand

Dal nostro corrispondente a Bangkok - 28 apr 2025 (Prima Notizia 24) Paola Guida is now Trade Commissioner I.T.A. in Bangkok, a delicate and relevant role especially in a particularly complex

historical moment dictated by the issue of duties and their reshaping in a framework that has taken on aspects of a real “trade war”.

ITA is the Agency for the promotion abroad and the internationalization of Italian companies and is the government agency that supports the business development of our companies abroad and promotes the attraction of foreign investment in Italy. With a motivated and modern organization and an extensive network of offices abroad, ITA provides information, assistance, advice, promotion and training to Italian small and medium-sized enterprises. Using the most modern tools of multichannel promotion and communication, it acts to affirm the excellence of Made in Italy in the world. ITA - Italian Trade Promotion Agency operates through a worldwide network of 79 offices in 65 countries. ITA offices are the ideal gateway for companies looking to establish business relationships with Italian partners, from sourcing Italian products to investment opportunities in Italy. On the occasion of Italian Design Day 2025, the Italian Trade Agency and the Embassy of Italy organized an event at Euro Creation Flagship Thonglor on March 15 to celebrate Made in Italy - Fashion, Design & Manufacturing with the New Academy of Fine Arts. Activities to support Italian design continued on March 25, with ITA and Embassy of Italy organized the event “Mixology and Magic of Interior Design,” at Seasons of Living Ekkamai Showroom. On April 4, the International Day of Italian Design in the World 2025 edition was also celebrated in Cambodia, at the T-ONE Building furniture showroom with an exhibition dedicated to the “Compasso d'Oro” awards, a video on the work of architect Renzo Piano, and a panel talk focused on the concept of inclusivity and how design can work for a better quality of life and usability of the urban and social context. Leading the ITA Bangkok office, as ICE Office Manager, is Paola Guida, married, mother of a 24-year-old girl. She holds an MBA Master's degree and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science - economics major. She is fluent in Italian language (native speaker) of course but also English, French and Spanish. Paola Guida is a senior trade promotion specialist with extensive experience in international trade relations and business development. She has worked for the Italian government for more than 30 years, spending over 10 years in Hong Kong and China, developing an extensive network of contacts and business relationships in the region. In October 2019, she was assigned to ICE New York, where she served as Head of the Fashion and Beauty Division. Paola Guida has achieved excellent results by initiating and promoting trade for numerous Italian companies, whether start-ups, conglomerates or semi-government structures,

mainly in the consumer goods (jewelry, cosmetics, fashion) and food and beverage sectors. Since September 2023, she has been residing in Bangkok, Thailand, where she currently serves as ICE Office Manager for Thailand and Myanmar. We interview her about ITA operations in Bangkok and about trade relations between Italy and Thailand, albeit within a more general framework of global trade interchange. What is the role of ITA Italian Trade Agency aka ICE Agency here in Bangkok and what tasks does it perform? First of all, it should be clarified that ICE operates equally all over the world. ICE is the Italian government agency that promotes Made in Italy in the world, so it takes care of the internationalization of companies but also the attraction of foreign investment in Italy. This is by law. We have about 70 offices around the world but we cover many more countries because we have so many points of correspondence, so offices that are kind of “antennas” scattered all over the world. Our supervising ministry is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) and the foreign offices are considered trade promotion offices (Trade Promotion Section) of the Embassies of Italy around the world. We are therefore, an entity that basically deals with the promotion of made in Italy and the internationalization of Italian companies, and we operate if we can say so with two lines of activity: one is the activity that we carry out with institutional funds within the annual promotional programs to get companies in their internationalization activity and therefore, we organize national pavilions at Fairs, we organize Conferences, we carry out B2B and we make incoming of foreign operators to Italy at the main fairs and for innovative events. In Thailand, specifically, ICE Bangkok organizes Italian participation in selected fairs that are a constant in our planning such as Thaifex Anuga Asia and Cosmoprof CBE Asia, this year we have also included Propack which is about both packaging and printing dedicated machinery, and then in October there is an Italian presence at Asia Ceramics and Stones which returns to Bangkok in 2025. There will be two pavilions one related to ceramic and marble processing machinery and the other to finished products. As for ThaiFex Anuga Asia, which takes place at the end of May, we will have an Italian Pavilion of nearly 40 Italian companies, where there will be culinary demonstration activities, wine tasting, pizza tasting, and then, on May 29 at 3:30 p.m., there will be a Talk in support of the candidacy of Italian Cuisine as a UNESCO intangible asset, whose candidacy was submitted by Italy two years ago and will be evaluated by the UNESCO commission in November 2025. In mid-June there is Propack where, on the other hand, we will have an Italian Pavilion with a few selected companies from the printing and related services sector, at the same time as the Italian Pavilion organized by UCIMA, which is dedicated to the entire packaging sector of Italy. At the end of June there will be Cosmoprof CBE Asia, which is the Cosmetics Fair, where we will have a national pavilion with 22 companies. Finally in October, participation in Asia Ceramics. These are the big activities of the Fairs. Also with promotional funds, activities are organized to support some sectors that fall under special lines of promotion indicated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as Design Week, Cooking Week or Made in Italy Day. In the first half of the year, many activities were carried out for Italian Design Day - IDD 2025 not only in Thailand but also in Cambodia. In the second half of the year there will be more activities related instead to the promotion of Italian Cuisine. Then there are, other projects intended for the promotion of Italian wines and spirits, and wine tasting activities have been organized, different activities for

the promotion of Italian Aperitivo, so, promotion of Italian liquors and Italian cocktails, we participated in the Bangkok Bar Show 2024, and we plan to participate in the 2025 edition as well. This is the line of promotional activities. On the side of promotional activities, ICE Agency also carries out support activities for companies that want to enter international markets, in Thailand in our specific case. ICE Agency mainly supports small and medium-sized companies by providing information and initial assistance services, partner search and operator profiles, making notes and market research for sectors of particular interest in the local or potential market for Italian companies. In addition, we provide more complex services such as organizing product presentation events aimed at the trade, customized market surveys and statistics, and various other types of services that can be custom made to the needs of the individual company. Most of the services provided by ICE Agency are free of charge. Services that are more complex or have another degree of customization are on an estimate and fee basis. However, some services such as partner search are free of charge for companies with less than 100 employees. So, we help companies, do a scouting activity, look for new partners, provide country-notes, sector notes, so initial orientation or more in-depth information about Thailand, interchange, etc. We are living through a very complex and particularly difficult historical moment to decipher especially in the area of international trade. From your current privileged vantage point here in Bangkok, can you tell us what is your view about the sudden changes that are taking place in the area of tariffs and about the effects on international trade? If you refer to the U.S. decision regarding tariffs, I think it is too early for us to give an opinion on the effects and consequences that such a disruption of the status quo will bring. What is certain is that all businesses will face a complex and difficult period, all the more so those whose business is heavily export-driven. In our small way, some first effects have been noticed by some local companies, very exposed with the U.S., that have given up missions to Italy to try to cope with such a sudden situation with the characteristics of a real earthquake, refocusing their attention towards their main core business, and not on other markets, at least not at the moment. Of course, countries that are particularly exposed with the U.S., especially those in the Asean region where there is a lot of production destined for the U.S., will face a period of adjustment and rebalancing that is likely to affect not only costs but also growth trends. Unlike Thailand, which is apparently making a “lonely” move vis-à-vis the U.S., demanding a reshaping of the tariff increases placed by the Trump Administration, without appealing to ASEAN or other EU organizations, is Italy moving as a consubstantial part of the European Union? Europe, understood as the European Union, has a single customs policy with regard to third countries. Therefore, there is no provision for negotiations carried out by individual states independently, partly because in the EU there is free movement of goods and what enters one of the member states then can be conveyed throughout the EU, with no barriers either tariff or non-tariff. For the Asean area, on the other hand, member states can move autonomously and each has a specific customs and market access policy. Even in trade and commerce between Italy and Thailand, Italy always moves as a component of the European Union and not as an individual country, right? Sure Italy does it. Bangkok is home to the diplomatic headquarters of the European Union, with its own Ambassador. In recent years there has been fervent activity in negotiating the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the EU and Thailand with

regular meetings in both Brussels and Bangkok and which everyone hopes will be concluded by 2025. FTA that would allow European and Thai goods to move more freely with a defined and jointly agreed set of rules facilitating trade, simplifying procedures and access to each other's markets, with mutual benefits for Thailand and EU countries.

di Francesco Tortora Lunedì 28 Aprile 2025