Interview: Carine Lespayandel – Executive Director, French Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI), Singapore



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The executive director of the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) in Singapore, Carine Lespayandel pinpoints the key facets of the Singaporean economy that have captivated the continued interests of French companies, while highlighting the chamber's fundamental role in facilitating investment growth between the two countries moving forward.

What underlying factors have characterized Singapore as such an appealing investment destination for French companies?

Singapore is indeed an attractive investment destination, and especially for the biomedical sector, because it has sophisticated infrastructure, a relevantly skilled workforce and great logistical connectivity to regional markets. Most notably, it has a robust intellectual property framework, ranked fourth in the *World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2015/2016*, that bolsters the confidence of medical technology firms and investors.

As such, several French companies have set up their regional HQs, manufacturing sites, and R&D centers in Singapore. Global healthcare leader Sanofi for instance has made Singapore its global manufacturing base. International SOS, the world's leading medical and travel security risk services company, bioMérieux, a leader in in vitro diagnostics, and Servier, a leading French independent

pharmaceutical company, have made Singapore their regional headquarters. There are also many companies engaged in research and product development in Singapore, many with their own R&D centers and labs, from Essilor (in ophthalmic optics) to Danone Nutricia (medical nutrition) to L'Oréal (skin biology).

[Featured_in]

In terms of research and scientific institutes there is also no scarcity. CNRS (The French National Centre for Scientific Research) set up its ASEAN regional office in Singapore in 2014. Between Singapore and France, there are several joint research programs and laboratories that pool together our human and material resources.

We have a very dynamic community here in Singapore, thanks to the very favorable environment for the sector.

Why is the chamber the ideal platform to help companies navigate the increasingly complexities of the Singaporean landscape?

The Singaporean Government is receptive to foreign investment and collaborations with foreign companies and is proactively working to build its expertise in the biomedical sector. It is constantly working to improve its infrastructure and expand its networks and it has pledged high investments to R&D, productivity and innovation programs. These investments and initiatives make Singapore a competitive and attractive place to do business.

In a globalizing world that is constantly changing and moving forward, processes can at times seem daunting and complex. The French Chamber in Singapore thus takes up the task of facilitating various business processes, from accelerating internationalization of French companies – their growth in Singapore, which include commercial services such as company setup, visa, domiciling and recruiting services, trade missions and French Pavilions at regional trade shows, to integrating our members into the local business fabric, through meetings, forums and networking sessions.

Pertinent to this industry, the French Chamber has been organizing the French Pavilion for the International Dental Exhibition and Meeting Singapore (IDEM Singapore), the leading dental show in Asia-Pacific, and the Medical Fair Asia, the leading medical and healthcare trade fair for the region, which will be held later this year from 31 August to 2 September. Through our Pavilion, we bring together a wide spectrum of equipment and product manufacturers, dealers and industry professionals, and provide a platform for them to reach buyers in the region, gain invaluable feedback and insights and make contacts.

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How much of a presence do French companies have when it comes supporting the country's healthcare and life sciences sector?

Here at the French Chamber, we see that there is a wide range of French healthcare players in Singapore & ASEAN, each with an area of expertise and a suite of innovative solutions. We wish to promote the French expertise in this sector through a visible and integrated effort and we are thus starting to work in September on a "Smart Health" platform.

This will be a dedicated committee in our Business Club that coordinates roundtables and workshops and facilitates exchanges between and among firms and industry principals across the biomedical sciences and healthcare sector. Following the Patient's journey, all actors in the industry will be represented, from the very first steps (training, information, nutrition, pharma) to the diagnostics, treatment and other services (hospitals, equipment, devices, insurance, services, etc.).

Its ambition is to be aligned with the health priorities of Singapore, in order to meet upcoming needs for services, support and solutions in integrated ecosystems made up by MNCs, SMEs and start-ups. Through this platform, we hope to promote an exchange of information and sharing of ideas and industry best practices, develop synergies and encourage collaboration.

We successfully launched our "Smart Cities" platform last year which showcased the collective strength of French technological companies and we believe "Smart Health" will be similarly well received.

With over 35 years of history now, the chamber has clearly served a pivotal role in facilitating investment growth between France and Singapore. How has the scope of FCCI Singapore's services evolved alongside the country's rapid socioeconomic development?

Established in 1979, the French Chamber of Commerce in Singapore belongs to a worldwide network of 113 French Chambers (CCIFI) in 83 countries with over 33,000 companies.

Our mission is to develop relations between our members and the Singaporean business community, and to encourage and facilitate economic, commercial and investment relations between France and Singapore.

We accompany French companies in their mission of setting up and scaling up in Singapore through a range of tailor-made services, from organizing business prospection missions and coordinating pavilions at regional trade exhibitions, to providing company set-up and visa application services, recruitment services through our EA-licensed HR department, and domiciling services at our Business Centre.

At the same time, we seek to be a platform of exchange and networking and to this effect, we organize, through 18 dynamic committees in our Business Club, meetings, forums, workshops and networking sessions. The committees are organized either by sector or function, and each is co-steered by industry principals and practitioners in the domain. Members get access to all committees, and with over 200 events organized each year (at least 3 a week), there is no scarcity of opportunity to gain targeted information and opportunities for network and exchange.

Open to all, the Chamber has among its members world-leading MNCs and SMEs – French, Singaporean and international, and the most enterprising and innovative start-ups. We seek to capitalize on this diversity, capture synergies and create opportunities for collaboration. This network of nearly 700 companies and over 4,000 contacts is steadily growing and evolving in tandem with the business environment.

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