

magazine

# VOYAGEUR



a publication of the Thai-Canadian Chamber of Commerce

## WE'RE BACK!



2014

**BEAVER INVITATIONAL  
CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT**  
SATURDAY, APRIL 5 | PHOENIX GC, PATTAYA

PREMIER SPONSORS



EXECUTIVE SPONSORS





# DFDL Legal and Tax – Pioneers

Voyageur recently interviewed Angus Mitchell, Partner and Managing Director of Thailand's DFDL's offices.

DFDL has its roots deep in the fertile soil of the Mekong region and DFDL is a truly Asian invention, starting in a residential shop house in Lao PDR in the fall of 1994. The initial partners Mary Flipse, a Lao-American, Todd Dirksen and David Doran built the firm from the ground up, working on the second floor and living on the third floor while the fourth partner, Mr. Le, supported them. Shortly thereafter Mr. Le arranged the opening of the DFDL office in Ho Chi Minh City and moved to Vietnam from his home in Seattle, USA.

While each partner brought their own unique knowledge and expertise of Indochina and emerging markets to this new venture, a background in international corporate law and the ambition of a group of attorneys in their thirties, was shared amongst them. Their pioneering work quickly led to the inauguration of the first international law firm in Cambodia, where David Doran, while again working and living in the same building, opened the first DFDL branch office in 1995. From its humble shop house beginnings, DFDL has steadily grown to blanket nearly every country and key cities in ASEAN: Bangkok, Dhaka, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta, Nay Pyi Daw, Phnom Penh, Singapore, and Vientiane.

DFDL established a permanent office in Bangkok in November 2005 to better serve its growing client base in Thailand; initially being Thai-based financial institutions and businesses investing in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam and Bangladesh. Since then, DFDL has added offices in Samui and Phuket, and the Bangkok-based lawyers now predominantly assist clients in regards to their investments within Thailand.

Angus Mitchell has only been with DFDL and in Bangkok for a year, but there is a historical connection. At the outset of 1995 Angus and his wife Karen moved to Yangon, Myanmar, to take advantage of the investment boom that accompanied Myanmar's initial liberalization. Together with lawyers based in Bangkok, Angus opened an office for the law firm Russin & Vecchi, known as ILCT in Bangkok. He practiced there until mid-1997, when he moved to Singapore to join the Projects group at Linklaters, a UK law firm. In an interesting quirk of fate, that initial law office in Yangon is now part of DFDL.



*Angus Mitchell, Partner and Managing Director of Thailand's DFDL's offices.*

After 4 years in Singapore, Angus and his family decided to return to Canada in order for his 2 children to learn to ski, buy their first toques and otherwise establish their Canadian bona fides. Though they were native Vancouverites, they moved to Calgary where Angus was a partner in the energy and natural resources group at the law firm Bennett Jones. However, a client trip to Myanmar and a Thailand transaction for a Canadian oil and gas company in 2012 again infected Angus with the SE Asian bug. In short order the family had taken up residence in Bangkok, with Angus as the Managing Director of DFDL's three offices in Thailand and the head of the regional oil and gas group.

The mix of nationalities in DFDL's offices is reflective of the increasingly integrated world. At any time French, Dutch or German may be heard blending in with the usual Thai and English conversations. The firm's French roots are particularly strong, with French speakers in most of its offices, and Martin Desautels, a Quebec native, dividing his time between Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City as DFDL's Managing Partner.

Marcus Collins, a Dutchman and Bangkok resident for more than 20 years, heads up the firm's regional Real Estate practice, and spends half his time overseeing the firm's

Phuket office. A New York qualified lawyer, Marcus began his Asian career with Skadden Arps in Jakarta in 1990. Marcus and Angus first met in 1995 when Marcus was with ILCT and recruited Angus to open their Yangon office with him.

DFDL's Koh Samui office has its roots in the law firm Crawshaws, which commenced business in Samui in 2006, and was already well known in Samui when DFDL acquired it a few years ago. Michael Peart, the founder of Crawshaws and now the head of the Samui office, is an experienced Brit with many years of legal practice in Hong Kong under his belt prior to his move to Samui in 2004. If you are in luck on your next island sojourn, you will hear Michael and his band, The Flowers of Samui, playing at your favourite Samui bar. Michael is joined by Thai and expat lawyers and a capable team of paralegals and assistants. As Samui is a tropical paradise, their bread-and-butter is property-related work, but one never knows what the next client that wanders into their Bophut office will need.

DFDL believes that it distinguishes itself from its local competition in two ways: it has had a substantial (often dominant) presence in ASEAN nations for many years, and it includes the provision of tax advice as one of its core services. Its Lao-based regional head of tax,



# in Asia's Frontier Markets

the Irishman Jack Sheehan, plans to bolster the firm's Thai tax capacity by retaining more Thai tax advisers and spending up to half his time in Bangkok every month. So add Irish to the list of languages one hears in DFDL's Bangkok hallways!

DFDL's office in Phnom Penh, with over 39 lawyers, has become DFDL's largest. As the first foreign firm in Cambodia, the lawyers there have seen their share of political turmoil and uncertainty. Yet they pride themselves on their ability to apply their unparalleled experience to provide a measure of legal certainty amidst a regulatory framework that is often clouded with doubt. From large power projects to hotel acquisitions and general business files, the office is consistently busy with a variety of corporate and commercial work. The offices in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City often work jointly with their colleagues in Cambodia; advising clientele that are increasingly interested in undertaking a regional strategy from the outset.



*Martin Desautels, Cambodia*

When walking on the quiet streets of Vientiane's down town and strolling through the residential area, one probably would not expect to come upon this foreign law firm that now houses 14 Lao and international legal advisers and lawyers helping to shape some of the biggest hydropower projects in the region.

While battling a real estate climate that characterized as scarce and expensive, DFDL in Yangon, home to over 20 Myanmar and expatriate lawyers, reverted back to the idea of communal living for some of their advisers who share a residential home close to the office. Though the DFDL spirit is apparent in all of its twelve offices, it is probably the

strongest in this "DFDL Frat House" where legal and regulatory topics are discussed over morning coffee. With a new office in Nay Pyi Daw, DFDL in Myanmar is also at the forefront of helping to shape the new laws and regulations by providing legal support to the Myanmar government.

As ASEAN becomes more integrated, DFDL is further solidifying its regional presence by strengthening its affiliate relationship in Jakarta and growing its Bangladesh and Singapore offices. Though the region may experience downturns from time to time, DFDL's belief is that the demographics and economic fundamentals are such that the long term prospects for Southeast Asia are excellent, and DFDL intends to do its best to guarantee this outcome.



[www.dfdl.com](http://www.dfdl.com)