

Australian Businesses in Southeast Asia: Key Insights from the 2025 Survey

By Timothy Lawler

The 2025 Australian Business in Southeast Asia Survey shows Australian business in Southeast Asia is optimistic heading into 2026, even as risks to the global economy appear to grow. While barriers such as global political instability continue to shape the operating environment, Australian businesses are signalling long-term commitment to the region. However, the findings also show that business needs vary across the region, particularly regarding the understanding of ASEAN integration and how Australian businesses can capitalise on it. Evidence-based tools like the survey can be helpful in understanding these challenges and supporting Australian business presence in the region going forward.

Persistent Challenges, but Longstanding Commitment to the Region

Unsurprisingly, the 2025 survey showed global political and economic instability and disruption to international cooperation are important factors in shaping Australian business perceptions and operations. Other challenges – corruption and poor governance, barriers to ownership and investment, and lack of access to skilled labour – persist. Prior surveys show that these challenges are not new ([see prior editions here](#)).

Despite this, Australian businesses have a remarkably longstanding presence and depth of experience in the region. More than 60% of respondents have been operating in the region for more than 10 years. 77% of respondents expected their revenue to increase by at least 5% over the next five years, with one in three expecting increases of over 10%.

These findings – long-term commitment and continued optimism – despite challenging global economic conditions and persistent barriers, resonate with [Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040: Invested](#). This strategy focuses on expanding commercial links and facilitating more trade and investment between Australia and Southeast Asia. It identifies removing blockages, including tariffs and standards barriers, and deepening investment as two of four priority actions needed to increase trade and investment through to 2040 and beyond.

Australian Business in Southeast Asia Survey

With 2025 being the ninth year of its publication, the survey is a flagship project of the Australian Chamber of Commerce for ASEAN, in partnership with RMIT University and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It collates responses from Australian businesses in or considering entering the Southeast Asian market, and operating across the region in a range of sectors, predominantly professional and financial services. For the latest edition participation increased markedly to 341 respondents, up from 180 in 2024. The survey is packed with findings and insights that provide a detailed picture of Australian businesses in the region – [see the full version here](#).

Adding Value

Survey tools can be helpful in advancing the objectives of the Strategy, by gauging business responses to economic conditions, highlighting where blockages for Australian businesses exist, and assisting governments in providing targeted support to address them.

The survey points to business understanding of ASEAN economic integration as an area where this matters: the ongoing effort to reduce economic, regulatory, and institutional barriers among Southeast Asian economies in order to facilitate freer movement of goods, services, capital, and skilled labour across the region. The survey asked respondents how they perceived ASEAN integration, what benefits they associated with it, and whether they felt sufficiently informed.

Responses show there are uneven levels of understanding of ASEAN integration among Australian businesses operating in Southeast Asia, and notably, further desire in some countries to learn more. Businesses based in Malaysia for example, reported a significantly greater need for information on ASEAN integration, with 60% indicating they require more information, compared with 33% in Singapore.

These results point to the value of tailoring support measures to fit local business contexts.¹ They reveal the value of the survey as a tool for not only capturing business sentiment but also providing an evidence base to inform policy support for Australian businesses navigating ASEAN integration and capitalising on regional economic opportunities.

Looking Ahead – the 2026 Survey

Looking ahead, future editions of the survey will allow for deeper analysis of longitudinal trends, showing not just what challenges exist, but how they have evolved over time. This is crucial because the survey represents a snapshot in a rapidly changing global economic environment. Economic and political conditions in 2025 shifted quickly and unpredictably, often increasing risks for Australian businesses operating abroad. Notably Nicholas Moore AO, former Special Envoy for Southeast Asia who led the development of the Strategy, urged that it be reviewed annually to take account of changing circumstances in the region.

The Australian Business in Southeast Asia Survey is uniquely positioned to inform that process, offering an evidence base for more responsive, targeted, and effective government policy to support Australian businesses in Southeast Asia. The survey will open again to respondents in April 2026, continuing its longstanding role as a key measure of Australian business sentiment in the region, now and moving towards 2040.

¹ This could include targeted briefings on ASEAN regulatory frameworks, country-specific trade and investment guidance, and focused outreach by Austrade and DFAT posts.