

Wednesday, December 15, 2010

South China Morning Post

More to Cambodia than Angkor

The launch of Cambodia's Koh Rong, Asia's first environmentally planned resort, is expected to meet a market niche for pristine holiday destinations.

"Travellers now are more environmentally aware," says David Simister, chairman of CB Richard Ellis (CBRE) for Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia, the company leading the marketing and sales campaign to promote the island to developers of resorts and tourism infrastructure.

"While there are several eco-friendly resorts in the region, there are no eco-friendly destinations and this makes Koh Rong a unique development."

The island, the largest of 22 in an archipelago off the 600km coastline known as the Indochina Riviera, will be created around a stringent set of guidelines that aim to respect and preserve the natural environment of the area.

David Clarke, director at MAP Architects Hong Kong, and the brainchild behind the project's master plan, says the environmentally planned island will include low-density development, the reinstating of natural forest and animal habitation, the implementation of centralised water catchment, and the requirement for developers to maintain onsite water recycling programmes for landscape



Koh Rong is the largest of 22 islands in an archipelago off the Indochina Riviera coastline and is to become an environmentally planned resort.

irrigation and power conservation in addition to adopting ecologically sustainable materials, finishes and systems at every property.

"Under the guidelines, destructive and exploitive practices, such as the felling of natural forest and jungle, the stripping of marine life out of the waters,

water pollution and energy waste, shall cease," Clarke says.

The rare opportunity to build a resort from scratch, and the chance to ensure all of the island's development projects adhere to a specific environmental benchmark, has been made possible by the ownership

structure. The Cambodian government has granted the Royal Group, a local business conglomerate, a 99-year lease on the island.

"It will be difficult to replicate a project like Koh Rong elsewhere given the options to create quality tourism development is shrinking. It would also

be difficult to have full control over developments in other destinations and ensure that all projects conform to a certain environmental standard," Simister explains, adding that Koh Rong also allows developers to avoid mistakes such as overcrowding of mass speculative developments evident in established resorts such as Phuket, Koh Samui and Bali.

CBRE is in discussions with potential developers interested in the project. A five-year timetable has been slated for the first phase. Upon completion of the 25-year project, the island will feature a range of golf courses and leisure and entertainment areas centred around the marina.

Koh Rong is also expected to transform the landscape of tourism in Cambodia, which previously has hinged around Angkor Wat, the Unesco World Heritage site. According to a report from Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, only 7.15 per cent of the 2.16 million visitors to the country last year visited its beaches.

"With a limited hopper flight schedule in place from Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, it would be easy to take 10 per cent of current arrivals and see them extending with a beach stay by an average of three days until Koh Rong becomes an established competitor to Phuket and Bali," Simister says.