

# KSK-Kempinski teamwork

Developer signs deal with hotelier known for properties boasting unique surroundings, distinctive architecture, fascinating history and unbeatable location

by Laura Lee

ON Nov 18, when KSK Land Sdn Bhd sealed a management deal in Kuala Lumpur with Kempinski Hotels SA, Europe's oldest luxury hotel group, KSK Group CEO Joanne Kua Ying Fei revealed her intention to up the ante in Malaysia's service and hospitality sector.

She was delighted to have teamed with Kempinski, known to be extremely selective in choosing partners so as to maintain the highest standards of exclusivity, individuality and management focus. Kua points out Kempinski's hotels are known worldwide for their unique surroundings, architecture, facilities, history and location.

They are viewed as iconic places with which people wish to be associated and at which they wish to be seen. "This precisely defines what 8 Conlay strives to stand for," she says announcing the partnership for the developer's residences and hotel component.

It is also teaming with YOO for interior design and RSP Architects principal Hud Bakar for architecture.

In the heart of the KL's Golden Triangle, this 3.95-acre luxury development includes a 260-key Kempinski Hotel and serviced residences totalling 403 units.

Hotel and residences are in the hotel tower, which will now have 62 floors instead of 60.

Latest figures from the developer regarding the 8 Conlay project show the number of Kempinski serviced residences has been revised from 341 units.

Changes have also been made to the number of serviced apartments and their sizes, as announced at the developer's latest media briefing on Nov 18.

The project's two other adjoining towers will now have 1,092 serviced apartments instead of 1,207, in sizes ranging from 682 to 1,295 sq ft, not too far from the previous 600 to 1,200 sq ft.

KSK Land is also looking at a higher average selling price of RM2,700 per sq ft instead of the RM2,500 psf it announced in May.

Instead of 56 floors, its latest fact-sheet shows Tower A will now have 60 floors; while Tower B will have 55 floors



The Siam Kempinski Hotel with its gardens is a city resort in Bangkok

(previously 51).

All three towers will be linked by a central retail podium. Kua reveals its retail component will be more lifestyle-oriented. Though it will not be large, KSK Land will be looking at how to give it the necessary "edge".

The hotel and residences will enjoy facilities such as Kempinski The Spa plus a variety of restaurants and bars in the hotel.

## Kempinski in Thailand

Kua believes the inclusion of 8 Conlay in Kempinski's portfolio of "trophy landmarks" in the way of hotels and resorts will reinforce Kuala Lumpur's image as a major Asia-Pacific destination.

KSK Land flew a select group of media to Bangkok days before announcing its KSK-Kempinski partnership so they could experience Kempinski's distinctive and unique service offerings at the European hotel group's sole Siam Kempinski Hotel in Thailand.

In a Bangkok interview with *FocusM*, Geneva-based Kempinski's vice-president of public relations Maria Kuhn says this "city resort" in Thailand's City of Angels has been recognised as market leader for the past six months.

Surrounded by 10 shopping malls and within the Bangkok entertainment district, this four-year-old hotel is owned by Kempin Siam Co Ltd. It enjoys high occupancy rates and average room rates of US\$250. Aside from its 303 rooms, of which 42 are suites, there are 98 serviced residences.

Of the Kempinski hotel in KL, to be completed in 2020 by KSK Land at the end of its development, she says the European group with its origins in Germany plans to bring a Malaysian version of the Kempinski brand to

Kuala Lumpur. "We will try to localise it as it needs to be a Malaysian hotel."

While Kempinski believes in customising each hotel to the local market, she emphasises "we always try to be different".

Kuhn is also of the opinion that the more hotel brands a country has, the higher its destination profile.

In seeking people to work in the Kempinski hotel in KL, she says: "We try to use the locals as much as we can and provide them with training. We will come in early enough to get the right people. The concierge, for instance, needs to have local staff."

Kuhn, a German, says some key management positions will be held by foreigners, as in the case of the Siam Kempinski Hotel, which has five expatriate staff-members.

They include hotel manager Oliver Schnatz and those working in the food and beverage division, such as its chefs.

Kuhn points out Kempinski's international hotel business started with a small but popular wine store and restaurant in Friedrichstrasse, Berlin.

Given its founder Berthold Kempinski's passion for the finest food and his emphasis on exceptionally innovative approaches to gastronomy, Kempinski restaurants soon become destinations in their own right. This is reflected in Siam Kempinski Hotel's various food and beverage outlets.

Of how luxury is defined by Kempinski, Kuhn says: "We see luxury as limited. It is having space and time, and time is luxury."

"If we as a luxury company can give you more time to enjoy the services we provide, part of the objective has been met," says Kuhn, who has more than 15 years' experience in the hospitality industry.

Luxury is also defined as offering guests personalised service and attention, she explains. "I want to be treated as an individual when I come to a hotel."

Commenting on Kempinski's growth, she says it was the first company to enter Russia. "We

were also first to go into China 20 years ago. Today, we have 20 hotels there."

Kuhn says the 117-year-old Kempinski Hotels, which manages a portfolio of 75 five-star hotels in 31 countries, sees potential for growth in Southeast Asia. The group opened its first 141-room Kempinski Hotel Nay Pyi Taw in Myanmar in November.

This hotel's 15,000 sq ft, self-contained Grand Royal Suite, with meeting and leisure facilities, housed US President Barack Obama during the Asean Summit in Myanmar's capital.

## Expansion plans

With the opening up of Myanmar, Kempinski has signed on for a second property to be opened in its largest city and former capital, Yangon, by the fourth quarter of 2016.

Aside from being Myanmar's gateway destination and home to its main port, Yangon is also the country's most important business hub.

Kempinski will convert a Colonial former State House into the 229-room Kempinski Hotel Yangon, which will have three restaurants, a lobby lounge, rooftop bar, grand ballroom and swimming pool.

This new hotel's Kempinski The Spa facility, with eight treatment suites, is expected to open in the third quarter of 2015. Considered another landmark property, it is expected to complement the Kempinski Hotel Nay Pyi Taw.

The group is also eyeing Hong Kong and Singapore. Since these two markets are considered "very expensive", Kuhn says, it has been quite difficult to penetrate them. Furthermore, she adds, the right partner is crucial.

Mike Haemmerli, Kempinski senior vice-president of development, in KL for the signing of its 8 Conlay management agreement, says while the group plans to grow globally, it is very selective. "We take a long time to select the right location and the right partners."

He says the group will have 84 hotels open in the next 12 months. Of properties in the pipeline, he adds, it will look at 108 hotels open in the near future.

"We are very clear in our focus on Southeast Asia and are seeing the fruit of our labour." Having established itself in two key Southeast Asian destinations - Jakarta and Bangkok - Kempinski's focus will be on expanding its presence in these two cities, with more leisure resorts. *FocusM*



Kempinski The Spa's relaxation room

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