

Samui strikes bonanza of rooms

New luxury hotels compete for clients with deep pockets

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SAMUI

In a recent report by Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks, which tracks developments in resort markets in Thailand, the number of rooms in Samui had surged past 16,000 units this year.

Currently, only 8 per cent of rooms can be classified as luxury units, however, with 51 per cent falling under the "mid-scale" products. About 13 per cent are "budget units" while 28 per cent are "upscale" rooms, he says.

The shortage of luxury rooms has prompted some investors to secure seafront properties in the hope of building five-star estates to tap this segment. At the same time, the average price of rooms has fallen 13 per cent, reflecting a glut in supply.

The slowdown is due to a combination of factors, says Barnett. These include a global slowdown and a steep fall in the travel industry last year.

Samui has "experienced growing pains in its emerging tourism surge", he says. "The first-half of 2009 saw arrivals down by 23 per cent," he says. Local politics has been one of the main reasons for the slump.

The second half of last year saw a rebound in visitors, which helped improve business. But the violent



HANSAR BO PHUT recently opened.

events during the past two months in Bangkok could have a far more negative impact, he says.

To offset dwindling arrivals from the US and Europe, many hotels are looking to attracting visitors from regional markets such as China and India.

Overall, Barnett expects a gradual recovery.

Among the big draw-backs to growth in Samui has been a "lack of international airlift and tourism attractions", he says.

Such traffic is crucial if Samui is to develop further as a hospitality destination, he adds.

With 541 new internationally managed rooms to open in the next 15 months, he says the outlook appears significantly better than last year. The first of five branded luxury hotels to open this year is Hansar Koh Samui, a distinct high-end resort with classical interiors amid large grounds that include a large swimming pool over-



looking its wide beachfront. The hotel with 74 rooms opened in April and has enjoyed good reviews from travellers.

It also houses one of the best gastronomic outlets in Samui, serving world class cuisine in a highly romantic ambience.

Next month should see the opening of Banyan Tree Samui in Lammai Beach with 78 rooms.

W Retreat Koh Samui in Mae Nam with 75 rooms will also open midyear, followed by Infinity Residences & Resort at Bang Po, with 55 rooms.

Conrad Koh Samui Resort & Spa, with 79 rooms at Thong Krut, will open in December.

Vanna Belle Samui with 189 rooms in Chawaeng Beach will open in March next year.



HANSAR RISES three floors. Its swimming pool, above, is facing the sea.



BARNETT