

Creating Distinction beyond Boundaries

The Vietnamese real estate market has become attractive in the eyes of foreign investors. With international-standard development projects, foreign property developers have affirmed their position in Vietnam. Vietnam Economic News' Thu Ha talked with Lai Voon Hon, the CEO of Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd, an exclusive development manager for London-listed Aseana Properties Limited.

◆ *Could you tell briefly about Ireka in Vietnam?*

Ireka Corporation Berhad is a company listed on the Main Board of the Malaysian Stock Exchange, engaged in construction, property development, hospitality and leisure and IT. In Vietnam, it operates through its subsidiary, Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd.

In 2007, we set up a fund called Aseana Properties Limited (Aseana) which is listed on the London Stock Exchange. Aseana has appointed Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd as its exclusive development manager. At present, Aseana concentrates on two real estate markets which are Malaysia and Vietnam. We are very confident and optimistic about the mid and long term prospects of Vietnam. Its young, hardworking population, huge FDI flow, etc. attracted us to Vietnam three years ago and our confidence in Vietnam's fundamentals still remain unchanged until now. We strongly believe in the future of Vietnam and that its real estate sector will grow in tandem with the country's growth. What we saw in Malaysia 20 years ago as well as China in the last 10 years made us believe that Vietnam will soon follow suit.

◆ *How many projects has Ireka developed in Vietnam? Which project would you like to emphasize?*

Within a short span of just three years, we have invested in four projects with

approximately US\$65.7 million in equity which has a total gross development value of more than US\$1 billion. In 2008, we received two investment licences for a mixed residential and commercial development named Queen's Place in District 4 as well as for the International Hi-Tech Healthcare Park project in Binh Tan District, a healthcare-themed commercial and residential development. Additionally, we have a 17 percent equity investment in the Nam Long Investment Corporation which is a leading player in the real estate market in Vietnam, for luxury development projects in District 7.

With the International Hi-Tech Healthcare Park, the local Vietnamese can get a complete, world-class healthcare system right here in the country instead of obtaining them overseas. This 'Medical City' will be the first and only premier international development in Vietnam which includes a hotel and convention center, medical retail mall & office suites, a tertiary care & teaching hospital, professional medical suites, research center & medical suites, serviced apartments, an international primary school, an institute of medical science and technology, a resident clubhouse as well as laboratories. Together, they form an exceptional healthcare, business, education and community development that aptly reflect its theme as the 'City of Life'.

◆ *What are the uniqueness of Ireka's proj-*

ects in Vietnam?

We are different from other real estate developers in Vietnam. We affirm that our presence in Vietnam is based on a long term commitment. Hence, we invest a lot of time and resources to work with the local partners as well as to learn from each other, emphasizing on continuous improvements. The local authority has also been very supportive of our endeavors in many ways.

The Ireka Group has been in operation for over 43 years, and we have experienced the ups and downs of the economy. We have learnt many practical experiences, and have never given up even in the most difficult phase of the recent global economic crisis, because we believe that the good times will be back again soon. It is all part of the economic growth cycle. Therefore, the only thing we focus on is bringing the best practice we have implemented in Malaysia, to Vietnam. We also emphasized on landscape and environment in order to create the harmony in living; in the homes we build and the communities we create. Commitment to innovation and excellence are our hallmarks. We believe that with the rapid growth of Vietnam's economy especially in Ho Chi Minh City, the economic hub of the country, the demand for world-class residential apartments, commercial buildings, hospitals, etc is very high. We aspire to be the one of the first foreign companies to meet all those requirements for the local people. ■