



Green developer is on a mission to show Hong Kong's moneyed elite the joys of 'intelligent luxury' in his hideaway resorts

AT HOME IN THE SLOW LANE

Sonu Shivdasani was in town this month not only to promote Six Senses Private Residences, one of his environmentally conscious brands, but to encourage wealthy property investors to think in terms of "intelligent luxury".

The Eton- and Oxford-educated entrepreneur is on a mission to change the way the rich think about sustainable living and quality of life. After success with changing the attitude of some Russian oligarchs, who have experienced the Six Senses way of life in the Soneva range of hideaway resorts, he hopes Hong Kong's moneyed elite can do the same.

About half the private eco-villas in one of his latest projects, Soneva Kiri on Koh Kood, in the eastern Gulf of Thailand, near the Cambodian border, have been sold. But more luxury beach-style homes are being built at other destinations, such as Yao Noi, off Phuket. Prices range from US\$4.5 million to US\$7 million for a variety of villa sizes - from four to six bedrooms - with the option to rent all or

part of the property out. The villas, all with pools and access to a solar-powered electric cart and bicycles, are designed to blend into Koh Kood's tropical landscape while being equipped with the latest luxury technology. Villas average 1,275 square metres of interior and exterior living space, in 3,830 square metres of private gardens on what is Thailand's fourth-largest island and one of the least developed. Natural materials from sustainable sources are fully incorporated into the structure, which is built by techniques "adapted to sustain the integrity of the environment and the local communities".



Sonu Shivdasani says there's fun in green living

Occupying a secluded part of the Koh Kood's jungle is the Eva, a zero-emissions ecological suite and prototype of the forthcoming Evaluation brand. The Eva showcases a range of environmental technologies built into a bio-climatically designed structure made from non-toxic and

locally sourced building materials. Six Senses' own permaculturalist worked with craftsmen to perfect this ambitious project and, like other Soneva villas, it has attracted the attention of the rich and famous eager to immerse themselves in a greener lifestyle.

Shivdasani certainly believes in putting fun into green living, and that includes "treetop" dining experiences at his resorts, activities for kids and the outdoor Cinema Paradiso. Soneva Kiri's restaurant uses locally grown ingredients and some from the resort's own organic gardens, while The Den is a bamboo-made children's activity centre shaped to resemble a stingray. Shivdasani also has his architects and engineers perfecting the treetop dining pods so that wine waiters can fly by suspended wire to top up glasses.

"Slow living" is the concept Six Senses wants the minted to embrace, encouraging them to kick off their shoes, banish the noise of stock market bulletins and mobile communications for pampering, great food, fine wine and saving the world. "No news, no shoes" is the maxim. So serious is he that he has trademarked the acronym for "Sustainable Local Organic Wholesome Learning Inspiring Fun Experiences" and has produced a book about the whole concept and how it relates to Soneva, the eco-resorts run by Shivdasani and his wife, Eva.

A villa at Soneva Kiri, by Six Senses, on secluded Koh Kood

Healthy pipeline continues

Room crunch to hurt Vietnam's prospects until new entrants open from 2011. **Bernie Rosenbloom** reports

1 What is the current room inventory situation in Vietnam?

The lack of quality rooms remains the key hindrance in Vietnam's drive to accommodate more tourists, particularly during the high season.

According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), the country has 33 five-star hotels with a combined total of 8,564 rooms and 89 four-star properties with 11,068 rooms.

Accor general manager development Vietnam, Thibault Paquin, said: "Until the onset of the slowdown in tourism and business travel ... many parts of Vietnam struggled to provide sufficient affordable accommodation to travellers."

2 What changes are in store for the country by 2011/2012?

CB Richard Ellis (CBRE) reported that Hanoi's inventory would see an additional 3,000-odd four- and five-star rooms while supply in Ho Chi Minh City would jump 38 per cent to more than 7,000

rooms within the next few years.

Best Western International (BWI) alone plans to open 3,550 rooms by 2012. Other international chains, including Accor, Starwood, Banyan Tree, Hyatt, InterContinental Hotels Group, Six Senses and JW Marriott are planting their flags throughout the country.

Paquin, however, expected setbacks in planned openings due to construction delays spurred by funding problems. "In 2011 and 2012, we anticipate there will once again be shortages of internationally-branded hotels to accommodate demand."

3 What impact will this have on occupancy and room rates?

Tour operators are expecting more stable room rates and more reasonable terms on forward bookings. Still, a forecasted return to higher occupancy rates could mean higher prices.

Paquin noted that revenue per occupied room in Vietnam remained higher than in many neighbouring countries.

Glenn de Souza, BWI vice

president international operations for Asia, foresees rooms that currently cost between US\$65 and US\$85 climbing up to US\$120 to US\$150 by 2012.

4 Where are the high-end developments concentrated?

Just about everywhere in the country. BWI's de Souza pointed to Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Danang as major gateways. Projects were also rising in Halong Bay, Hoi An, Hue, Nha Trang, Sapa and Dalat, he added.

"The investment boom along the Danang coastline still continues with several five-star hotels opening later this year, and more earmarked to open next year," said Trails of Indochina COO Matt Masson.

5 What does the future hold beyond 2012?

More growth. Victoria Hotels and Resorts group managing director Eric Simard and sales and marketing director Irene Wong said most hoteliers were optimistic about Vietnam's tourism industry, and international hotel groups would

continue their expansion plans.

Vietnam would need to improve its infrastructure and be more dynamic in promoting tourism if it wished to compete with its neighbours, they said.

Meanwhile, Accor is keeping the faith as it prepares to almost double its portfolio in Vietnam by 2011. "We remain confident in the future of tourism in the country, buoyed by both international and burgeoning domestic travel markets," said Paquin.

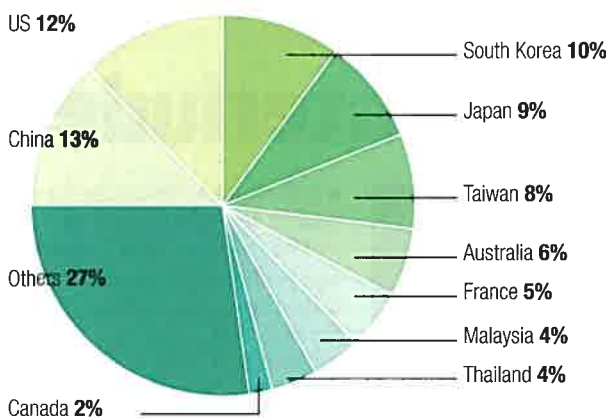
Vietnam foreign arrivals

2006	3.6 million
2007	4.2 million
2008	4.3 million
2009*	4.3 million
2010*	4.5 million
2011*	4.8 million
2012*	5.2 million

* Estimated

Source: Vietnam National Administration of Tourism

Top 10 markets, January to August 2009 (Total 2,479,939)



Source: General Statistics Office, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism

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