

Marang Resort

Marang, Malaysia

Project Type:
Commercial/Industrial

Case No:
CO28011

Year:
1998



Architecture Malaysia

SUMMARY

An environmentally sustainable resort village development located on 65 acres of mangrove swamp in a rural area on the east coast of Malaysia. The award-winning eco-resort, which faces the South China Sea, includes 100 detached wooden chalets, a restaurant, a conference hall, and other facilities. Completed in 1995, the resort features 2.5 kilometers of sandy beach and represents a harmonious blend of traditional and simple, modern forms, attuned to the natural landscape and the life of the local community.

FEATURES

- Careful preservation of the natural environment
- Extensive involvement of local artisans and carpenters
- Resort staff recruited from local villagers
- Local building materials
- Minimum disruption to wildlife and vegetation
- Materials ferried across the river on wooden rafts and pontoon bridges to preserve river wildlife and vegetation
- Use of traditional "sanggora" baked-clay roof tiles
- International holiday resort where 80 percent of the guests are foreigners

Marang Resort & Safaris

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SPECIAL FEATURES

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OWNER/DEVELOPER/MANAGER

Turnaround Managers Inc. (M) Sdn Bhd
Wisma ISP, No. 29A
Jalan Taman U Thant
55000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
011 603 242-1033 Fax: 242-5621

ARCHITECTS

AsSaffa Design Practice
Bahar Omar Architect

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The economic explosion in Pacific Rim markets, until recently, had created a fast-growing resort industry. While it is relatively easy to find boutique resorts, less common are eco-resorts with understated vernacular architecture that reflects the local community's organization, way of life, and values. Marang Resort & Safaris is such a resort—an example of peaceful coexistence between man and nature.

The resort is an environmentally sustainable development sculpted from 65 acres of mangrove swamp in the district of Marang, a rural area on the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula. The rural community, where the main occupations are fishing and farming, is approximately 25 kilometers (15.5 miles) south of Kuala Terengganu, the capital city of the state of Terengganu. The 65-acre development consists of 100 detached wooden chalets clustered on 20 acres and leisure facilities that include a swimming pool, library, BBQ patio, 150-seat restaurant, 200-seat multi-purpose conference hall, and a children's adventure park. Activities include many types of water sports as well as jungle and sea safaris and other excursions.

Marang Resort & Safaris is located on 2.5 kilometers of sandy beach engulfed in a green mangrove wetland. The winner of the 1997 special award in the leisure properties category of the International Real Estate Federation's Best of World Real Estate Competition (the FIABCI Prix d'Excellence), the project was developed with special attention to the preservation of the natural environment, and local residents were heavily involved in its construction and operation.

Construction began in 1992; artisans and carpenters from surrounding villages were recruited to do most of the work. Most building materials also came from the local area. To ensure minimum disruption to river wildlife and vegetation, materials were ferried across the river on wooden rafts and temporary pontoon bridges. Similarly, workers used only hand tools and light machinery in the resort's construction. According to an environmental impact assessment (EIA) by a team of researchers from the Malaysia's Bureau of Consultancy and Development at Universiti Kebangsaan, the resort "has done a commendable job in maintaining the natural environment of the area."

SITE AND DEVELOPMENT

Sandy-soil vegetation and coconut trees are found on the resort's beach front, while mangrove trees and nipah palms grow along the riverbanks. The river is rich in the life typical of a mangrove wetland. In the vicinity to the north, west, and south are picturesque kampungs (villages) and coconut smallholdings, with small offshore islands close by. A small, low-budget inn developed earlier also was present. Because of the site's unique environmental attributes and beauty, it was decided that any development must not unduly disrupt the existing topography or flora and fauna.

Three conditions formed the guiding spirit of the project: that it be wholly Malaysian, from concept to construction and operation; that environmental disruption be minimal; and that local residents be meaningfully involved at all stages of its development and operation. To minimize disruption to the fragile mangrove ecosystem, very little land clearing and land filling were done. Rather than fell the coconut and mangrove trees, chalets were sited among them. The result is a resort that provides a place for a "truly Malaysian experience," combining the best of nature, adventure, and culture with modern amenities.

The resort is owned and developed by Turnaround Managers Inc. (TMI), a management practice that specializes in turning around troubled or failing projects. The project management and operations of the resort were undertaken by its wholly owned subsidiary, Tenggara Gugusan Holidays (TEGUH).

PLANNING AND DESIGN

The overall sustainable planning concept was borrowed from the traditional Malay riverine village settlement, or kampung. Archetypal kampung houses, typically designed to be built on stilts along the riverbank and beach, were "inserted" into the existing environment with minimal land clearing and filling. Like Malay houses, they are spaced out in clusters, a community organization style that reflects the local way of life and values. The actual siting of buildings sought to preserve the natural setting, generally leaving the topography and ecology of the place undisturbed. The project was built in harmony with the natural elements in order to evoke the spirit of the place, its "genus loci," and thus absorb its ambience.

As guests approach from the main gateway and parking area, the natural features of the site define the public, semipublic, and private spaces. The reception lounge, restaurant, and swimming pool are located in the semipublic area on one side of the riverbank. The river creates a natural boundary separating the more private area along the far bank of the river and the beach, where the chalets are scattered in clusters. Jungle paths and river bridges link the various parts of the resort, and raised wooden walkways lead to buildings along the riverbanks.

As in Malay houses, spaces are defined by the hierarchy of public, semipublic, and private spaces, expressed in the transition from an open veranda to a small lounge/vestibule to a bedroom with a double bed or twin beds. The bathroom is located at the back of the house in a private courtyard, which, in the Deluxe Chalets, features an outdoor marble bath. Full-length louvered windows in the bedroom and vestibule/sitting area allow the entire chalet to be opened up to the outdoors and cooling sea breezes. While the architecture is traditional, the chalets are equipped with

the modern comforts of air conditioning, hot showers, and refrigerators—but no telephones to disturb guests. An interesting feature is the use of sanggora roof tiles, which are made of baked clay and are typical in this part of Malaysia and the southern region of Thailand.

Water is supplied to the chalets for bathing and washing (but not for drinking) by tubewells sunk into the ground. The water is pumped and passed through a treatment system to remove odor, bacteria, and coloration before being distributed to the individual chalets. Due to the topography and water table of the area, fresh drinking water is obtained off site throughout the year for the use of guests. The site does not permit laying sewage pipes to connect the individual houses. An aerobic sewage treatment system using independent "Supersept SS-2" units was installed instead; the environmental impact assessment report described it as "highly effective."

Development and building approvals were issued by the Marang District Authority, which generally has been supportive of the project. A number of public agencies also were involved in the approval process, notably the Department of Drainage and Irrigation for supervision of overall drainage of the site and wastewater drainage; the Department of Environment for environmental preservation and conservation and environmental impact assessment; the Fire and Rescue Department for the overall layout, building materials, and fire prevention measures; the Rural and Town Planning Department for assessment of the development's impact on the community and the rural area; and the public utilities for electricity, water, and telecommunication services.

FINANCING, MARKETING, AND MANAGEMENT

The property was acquired through a property-for-stock swap, giving the original landowners a 30 percent stake in the increased equity. Development was financed by the parent company, Turnaround Managers Inc., and a development bank that granted a loan designated for indigenous enterprise in the tourism industry. The developers take a long-term view of the project while attempting to generate sufficient income in the short term to cover operating expenses and service the bank loan. Surplus cash is invested in management development and improvement of resort facilities.

The owners are actively involved in the building of the project and operation of the resort through Tenggara Gugusan Holidays. TEGUH carries out selective marketing in Malaysia and abroad to potential guests who will appreciate the dynamic mix of nature, adventure, and culture that it offers. Word-of-mouth testimonials and recommendations from satisfied guests and returning customers also are effective promotions.

The management philosophy of the project calls for active and direct involvement of the local population in the development as well as operation of the resort. Resort staff, craftspeople, and carpenters are recruited from local villages within a 15-kilometer radius of the resort, almost none of whom have ever worked in a hotel resort. With this approach, the resort builds strong ties to the area, and the craftsmanship and good nature of the people are reflected in their work. Although management may be somewhat less efficient, the hospitality exhibited toward guests is genuine and helps them feel comfortable. The owners view this strategy as a social and business experiment in managing an international holiday resort. About 80 percent of the guests are foreigners who stay between one and three weeks.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Ecotourism has been identified as "the way of the future." In its purest sense, it attempts to create economic value for the preservation of pristine environments and indigenous cultures. Marang Resort & Safaris has taken great care to involve the local community at all times by providing job opportunities and playing a critical role in spurring businesses for other travel-related industries such as handicrafts and heritage tours. It also generates revenue for the state through its mostly foreign and out-of-state guests.

Also through its foreign guests, particularly Europeans, the resort helps to promote Malaysia as a preferred tourist destination. The development also has been visited by students from many universities in the region to study the mangrove ecosystem, resort architecture and management, and hotel catering. Thus, the resort functions as a teaching institution, providing valuable practical knowledge to students as well as to its guests and the public. Study visits are being extended to schoolchildren to instill in them an early appreciation of nature and Terengganu's heritage.

The three conditions laid down as a framework for development were followed throughout. In the process, the local people have participated meaningfully in the building and operation of an international resort and have shared in its socioeconomic benefits.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The ecology of the mangrove swamp is delicate, and its mangroves and nipah palms conceal a wealth of river life. Accordingly, the clearing of vegetation for infrastructure development was a challenge. Only the minimal area required for development has been cleared. To protect the mangrove undergrowth, even in the developed areas, no earth filling was done with the exception of the site of the conference hall and parking areas. The EIA report concluded that the resort's development has resulted in no reduction in either beach or mangrove flora species. The developed mangrove patches can still support aquatic and invertebrate fauna, and since the rooting system of the mangrove is still intact, soil fertility has not been affected.

The development of the resort has had no serious or permanent impact on water quality in the river, and there has been minimal or no impact on seawater quality. The selected clearing of vegetation and the replanting of exposed areas with trees, shrubs, herbs, palms, and grasses help to reduce soil erosion.

Because it is situated on the shore of the South China Sea and on the banks of the Sungai Palau Kerengga, the resort may be subject to the natural force of beach and riverbank erosion, and management has developed a practical contingency plan to deal with it. Built structures within the development are monitored for soundness on a regular basis, and the resort maintenance team also conducts periodic visual inspections to check for structural damage or movement.

The overriding principal in developing the resort was "Less is more." The end result is a resort that is a harmonious blend of traditional and simple, modern forms, attuned to the natural landscape and to the life of the local community. The development team has turned a failing resort into an ecologically sustainable, socially responsible, and economically feasible project.

EXPERIENCE GAINED

- Ecotourism is a high-risk undertaking in both ecological and economic terms, but the development team believed that the resort's unique potential could be realized fully with sensitive planning, a good business plan, and hard work. TMI took a calculated risk. The reward was solid absorption that stimulated local job growth and did little to disrupt the environment.
- To demonstrate a strong commitment to nature and a sense of social responsibility, the development team opted to involve local residents directly in the development and operation of the resort. Everyone involved benefited—the developer, the local community, and the guests.
- By creating a truly Malaysian experience, the resort fits into the local context. Local employees give the resort a local flavor and prevent isolation of the resort from the rural community. Malaysian hospitality has resulted in service with genuine warmth and in the reinforcement of native values.
- Ecotourism's emphasis on local resources and employment makes it attractive to developing countries. The economic impact from increased tourism and local job growth has benefited the resort, the local community, the state, and the country.
- Because of the selective infrastructure development strategy adopted by TEGUH, the impact of the resort on the diversity of plant species was minimal.
- Conducting an environmental impact assessment and following its recommendations greatly assisted in the resort's success.

PROJECT DATA																						
LAND USE INFORMATION																						
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Room rates/night: RM120 to RM250 ²																						
¹ Each room is housed in an individual chalet.																						
² Denominated in Malaysian Ringgit (RM).																						
DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE																						
Planning started: January 1991 Construction started: October 1992 Project completed: August 1995																						

DIRECTIONS

From Kuala Terengganu Airport: Head south along the Kuala Terengganu-Kuantan trunk road. Marang Resort & Safaris is located off the trunk road 8 kilometers (4.97 miles) south of the town of Marang.

Driving time: Approximately 45 minutes.

Prepared by Ginnie Sharkawy, ASID, and M. Atef Sharkawy, PhD, Coordinator, Graduate Programs in Land Development, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, in a collaborative effort between the College of Architecture, Texas A&M University, and the School of Building and Real Estate, National University of Singapore.

David A. Mulvihill, Editor, Project Reference File
Eileen Hughes, Managing Editor

This Development Case Study is intended as a resource for subscribers in improving the quality of future projects. Data contained herein were made available by the project's development team and constitute a report on, not an endorsement of, the project by ULI-the Urban Land Institute.

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1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W. Suite 500 West, Washington D.C. 20007-5201



Architecture Malaysia

By limiting land clearing and land filling and by siting chalets among the coconut and mangrove trees, development of the Marang Resort caused minimal disruption of existing topography and flora and fauna.



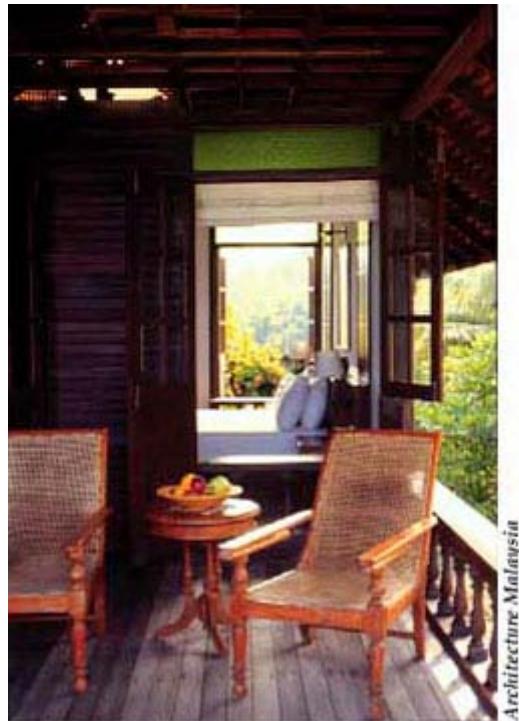
Architecture Malaysia

The resort is designed as a Malay village. Kampung houses are built on stilts and scattered in clusters along the riverbank.



Architecture Malaysia

Jungle paths, river bridges, and raised wooden walkways link different areas of the resort.



Full-length windows, open verandas, and vestibule/sitting areas allow the chalets to be opened up to the outdoors and cooling sea breezes.



Architecture Malaysia

The resort features a cascading swimming pool and other modern comforts such as air conditioning, hot showers, and refrigerators, but no telephones to disturb guests.



Site plan.