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Tropical island hideaway for a fraction of the big-city cost

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What kind of property can you buy for Bt9 million these days? A house in London? Forget it. You need at least Bt20 million for a small terraced house right next to an identical terraced house. And the view? More terraced houses.

The same can be said for Paris, Barcelona and even Sydney, where the average house now costs around Bt15.6 million.

So how about Koh Lanta? Tour operators and estate agents describe the island as "on the turn" or an "emerging destination". To a cynic, that usually means a tranquil backpackers' hangout about to be ruined by concrete. But that's not the case on this tropical island 1,000 kilometres south of Bangkok.

Until recently, the island had only a single unmade road, if you wanted to get around. Depending on your perspective, you could call that part of the charm. Today, the road is being paved, and flying time from Bangkok to Krabi is just 90 minutes. From there, it's an hour by car and ferry to the west coast of Koh Lanta. And what a coastline! Swooningly beautiful. The silky white beaches and jungle-clad hillsides are among the best on earth. Reassuringly, much of what lies behind it is national park.

The Oriental Residencea, a Thai-Norwegian 80-villa housing project, is perched on 30 rai of hillside close to the southwestern tip of the island. Behind it, national park; in front of it, the Andaman sea; all around it, a sweeping, majestic million-dollar view, and a short walk to Kan Tiang beach, the best on the island.

Each well-appointed luxury villa comprises four bedrooms, three bathrooms, dining-room, living room, kitchen, double garage, and two huge terraces. All floors are covered in polished granite, and cover 250 square metres. It seems a lot bigger, and the builders are flexible as to the internal layout.

"It's up to the buyer," said Ulf Myhre, one of the major shareholders in the project. "We can make rooms larger, add a spacious loft, a swimming pool, or whatever the individual buyer might require."

It's easy to see why buying a property here appeals to all ages and all nations. It's neither as hard nor as complicated as one might imagine.

"Every villa comes with a 30-year leasehold, plus the right to renewal, so the property can be passed on to the children," said Myhre, adding, "the property can also be let."

Prices start at Bt6 million for a basic split house. For a standard villa, prices start at Bt9 million and may vary according to special features required by the buyer.

Three show houses have already been completed at the Oriental Residencea, while orders for the construction of three more villas have been accepted.

The project's swimming pool and restaurant are well on the way, and enquiries are pouring in from Hong Kong, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, the

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United States - and Thailand.

Judging by the interest in the project, it looks like it's a matter of hurrying while stocks last.

Roger Beaumont

The Nation

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