

## ■ SPECIAL REPORT ■

## MALAYSIA

# FIVE-STAR BEACH LIFE IN JOHOR

Desaru Coast is attracting plenty of attention thanks to its picturesque location and a swathe of high-end developments, writes Peta Tomlinson

Build a luxury marina and the rich will surely come, says Bill Barnett, a veteran of the high-end hospitality industry in Asia.

"Wherever there are super yachts, the next question is, where's the real estate?" says Barnett, founder and managing director at C9 Hotelworks, a firm based in Phuket, Thailand, that specialises in luxury resort asset management and hospitality consulting.

The picturesque Desaru Coast in Johor, West Malaysia, is a case in point. Occupying nearly 22 kilometres of beachfront on the South China Sea, Desaru is a yachting mecca and, according to Barnett, an "interesting starting point" for visiting regional ports in Thailand, Vietnam, and Singapore.

Grand plans have been held since the 80s for Desaru as a premium integrated resort destination but, as explained in a recent report by Horwath HTL, a hospitality consulting brand, it

was only after sovereign wealth fund Khazanah Nasional Berhad unveiled a multibillion ringgit master plan about six years ago, inviting foreign investment, that those ambitions have begun to be realised.

The first of a three-phase development, set to evolve over 20 years, began with the Hard Rock Hotel & Resort opening in September 2018; the 275-room Westin Resort in April 2019; the 123-key Anantara Resort & Villas in January 2020; and the 45-key One&Only Desaru Coast in September 2020.

"As it stands now, Desaru Coast includes four hotels, two world-class golf courses, a water park, riverside retail and restaurants, and a convention centre," notes the Horwath HTL report.

Phase two includes a new international ferry terminal expected to open in July 2021, along with additional retail spaces, hotels, serviced flats and residences, as well as wellness or retirement villages.

The first residential development, The Maris Desaru Coast, aimed at the domestic market, opened in December 2019. Now, two international brands are offering upmarket residences with a view to attracting foreign buyers.

Minor International, one of the largest hospitality, restaurant and lifestyle companies in Asia Pacific, is the co-developer of Anantara Desaru Coast Residences, the destination's first resort branded residences, together with Themed Attractions Resorts & Hotels (TAR&H), a subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad. Anantara Desaru Coast

Residences comprises just 20 three- and four-bedroom luxury villas, each with between 3,100 to 6,426 square feet of fully furnished living space, a private infinity pool and direct access to the beach. The residences are situated along 17km of pristine beach and managed, maintained and serviced year-round by the five-star Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas.

Owners and residents benefit from full access to the resort's world-class facilities, including a private beach, a lagoon pool, an oceanfront infinity pool, Anantara Spa, a fitness centre, kids' and teens' clubs and a variety of restaurants.

Micah Tamthai, vice-president of real estate, Minor International, says a range of recent economic and infrastructure developments along the Desaru Coast have transformed the destination into a desirable market for property investors looking for beachfront properties.

Noting Juvai IQI's recent study showing that Malaysia, and particularly Johor, now ranks among the top five preferred countries for Asian property investors, he believes the time is right to launch these exclusive residences for sale.

"The current global pandemic has reshaped the real estate market in destinations like Desaru Coast that benefit from a prime beachfront location, luxury offerings and connection to major cities," Tamthai said.

"It has underscored the importance of nature and space, wellness and well-being, and working or running a business from virtually anywhere. All of these trends have positively



Anantara Desaru Coast Residences comprises 20 three- and four-bedroom luxury villas, each with a private infinity pool. Photo: handout

affected demand for the products that address them – including our Anantara-branded luxury residences.

"With Anantara Desaru Coast Residences, we wanted to develop a property offering more than real estate investment: more than a luxury home in one of the region's most beautiful coastal landscapes it is an opportunity to enjoy seaside living in an easily accessible and vibrant destination that appeals to everyone."

For those who are looking to earn rental returns from their property investment, Tamthai notes a similar shift in demand in the tourism industry.

"With the pandemic reviving interest in domestic tourism and with off the beaten path destinations like Desaru Coast now accessible to a more diverse group of travellers, we think the timing could not be better for

those looking to benefit from first-mover advantage as a pioneering investor in this nascent market," he said.

Horwath HTL's March 2021 market report on Desaru confirms this trend. It finds that recent openings of the first luxury hotels in the area have created pent-up demand for higher-end accommodation, and these hotels have enjoyed healthy occupancy because of their unique positioning, differentiated product offerings and lower room numbers.

Meanwhile, One&Only has plans for around 50 residences as part of its 128 acre (51 hectare) beachfront development, part of the brand's expanding collection of Private Homes in exotic locations around the world.

"Our strategy was always to develop an exclusive residential community in Desaru Coast

after the resort was complete and the experiences had been developed," explained Jerome Colson, General Manager of One&Only Desaru Coast. "Based on the success of the resort, we feel there is an appetite for guests to own a home in this incredible destination, offering amazing space and privacy."

One&Only Private Homes offers much more than a real estate investment, he continued, as buyers become part of a vibrant, active and like-minded community.

"We bring owners together to share special experiences, encouraging friendships to flourish across every generation," Colson said. "Investing in the first One&Only resort in Asia also means homeowners will have the ultimate space and privacy in our beachfront haven, a coveted place to be to cultivate well-

being, immerse in nature and enjoy exquisite dining and sports experiences."

Designed by Kerry Hill Architects with inspiration from the sea and tropical landscape, all of the Private Homes in Desaru Coast feature expansive indoor and outdoor living spaces and views of either the South China Sea or the resort's Els Club Golf Course. Its 27-hole layout is designed by four-time major champion Ernie Els.

Owners have the option of retaining their home for personal use or placing it in the resort inventory. Unlike some resort management programmes, there is no limit on the number of nights owners can stay.

No pricing or completion date has yet been announced but interested buyers can register on the One&Only Private Homes website.

### BUYING GUIDE

**What you can buy from 7.5 million ringgit (HK\$14.14m):**

**A three- or four-bedroom beachfront pool villa at Anantara Desaru Coast Residences, each with private pool and fully furnished. Facilities comprise a private beach, oceanfront infinity pool, lagoon pool, Anantara Spa, a fitness centre, a range of restaurants and more. For more information about Anantara Desaru Coast Residences, visit [www.anantaradesaru-residences.com](http://www.anantaradesaru-residences.com)**