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Home away from home

WHERE would you opt to stay the next time you go for a holiday with your entire family in tow? Well, if you follow the latest trend in holiday lodging, you'll probably opt for a serviced apartment instead of a hotel.

According to DTZ Debenham Tie Leung (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd associate director Jimmy Foo Yat Heang, more and more families, especially those from the Middle East and Singapore, are choosing serviced apartments because they work out to be more economical than having to rent a number of rooms in a hotel for the duration of the holiday. In addition, it is more comforting for parents to be able to have their children stay in a two- or three- bedroom apartment instead of being separated in different hotel rooms.

Foo said as the number of business travellers, who made up most of the serviced apartment sector's clientele, had shrunk since the economic crisis in 1997, many operators are now positioning their projects as an alternative to hotels for leisure travellers.

Among the serviced apartment projects that have managed to build up a reputation as a "home away from home" for holidaymakers and business travellers alike is PNB Darby Park, a RM179.4 million project developed by Permodalan Nasional Bhd on a 2.45 acre site in Jalan Binjai, Kuala Lumpur. The apartments, which began operations on July 22, are managed jointly by PNB Property Management Bhd and Sime Property International Pte Ltd and have been enjoying 70 per cent occupancy.

Launched recently by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, PNB Darby Park comprises 340 units of luxury serviced apartments, of which 226 units of studio, two- and three-bedroom units are completed, while the rest will be ready in stages. All the suites are tastefully furnished and have fully-equipped kitchens. The centralised location, facilities and the spaciousness of the suites are among the strong pull factors that have attracted the holiday crowd. Residents of PNB Darby Park are not only able to enjoy full cooking facilities, they are also able to benefit from a host of amenities that include restaurants, a swimming pool, gymnasium, children's playground, multi-purpose hall, laundrette, housekeeping and other services.

In as much as it is possible to make a serviced apartment feel like home, the designers have striven to make the interior of each apartment as subtle and comfortable as possible. This understated elegance is intended to act as a background for the knick-knacks and homely touches that a long stay traveller would be sure to introduce.

The largest suite of three bedrooms has 2,077sq ft of space - sufficient for a medium-sized family.

One of the most appealing features of the interior is that space has been maximised, and the use of heavy, cumbersome furniture has been avoided. Instead, the designers have opted for clean lines and pale earth colours that are livened up by the warm wood tones of the furniture. The sand-coloured carpeting is matched by beige drapes and act as a perfect backdrop for the pale olive sofa set in the living area and the dark olive cushions of the dining set. The fact that most of the furniture, floor and wall finishes, fabric and accessories were sourced locally makes the design even more commendable - as it shows the country has the latest in contemporary d`cor services and products.

The kitchen is simple and spacious and has everything a home would need

- it's equipped with blonde cabinets, hobs, cooker, microwave oven, refrigerator, toaster, utensils, crockery and cutlery.

The main bedroom offers a panoramic view of the city and is comfortably furnished in sand tones. Standing on the balcony, you get to feel close to architectural icons such as the Petronas Twin Towers and KL Tower. The other two bedrooms are equally well-furnished, but in different colours and finishes for variety.

Smaller families have a choice of a two-bedroom suite with a built-up area of 1,507sq ft. The d`cor is similar to the larger suite, but different colours have been chosen. Blue dominates in the living area furniture and is set off by pale yellow curtains.

Single guests who prefer smaller suites can opt for the studio units containing 538sq ft with an open layout plan. The living area is delineated from the bedroom by a wooden sliding door, while the cooking facilities are contained in a kitchenette near the entrance that's concealed by a foldable white door. Furniture in the studio living area is minimal - just a sofa set, TV cabinet and writing desk.

Besides the design and d`cor of the apartments and the facilities available, what has impressed guests of PNB Darby Park is the high quality of service provided by amiable and well-trained staff. Based on their feedback, it's clear that the serviced apartment project is going to give city hotels a run for their money.

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