

Special Focus Building a world-class education hub

Property

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THE sleepy town of Pagoh in Muar, Johor, will see some exciting changes in the coming years. After all, this is where Malaysia's first multi-varsity development — the Pagoh Education Hub — will be sited, says Mohd Salem Kailany, Sime Darby's head of property development 2.

Spearheaded by the government, the project will help the country achieve its aspiration of becoming a regional destination of choice for higher education. This is in line with the Education National Key Economic Area under the Economic Transformation Programme, which aims to raise the sector's contribution to gross national income by RM34 billion, to RM61 billion.

Mohd Salem tells City & Country that the Pagoh Education Hub will be developed based on the private financing initiative model, with Sime Darby Property Bhd as the master developer.

He says Pagoh's strategic location is the reason it was chosen for the ambitious project. "The town is located almost in the centre of two of Malaysia's busiest financial and education hubs. It is about 180km from both Kuala Lumpur and Johor Baru."

A holistic and eco-friendly education hub

The 531-acre Pagoh Education Hub will be a part of the 4,142-acre Bandar University Pagoh (BUP) — the first such development in the country to have shared facilities.

The hub, which has a gross development value of about RM1.2 billion, will be home to Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, International Islamic University Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and Polytechnic Pagoh.

"Construction of the hub has already begun, and we expect to attract about 11,000 students upon its opening," says Mohd Salem.

Pagoh Education Hub is expected to be completed in 2015 and will commence operations in 2016. Upon completion, it will be able to support a student population of about 16,800.

The hub will boast centralised shared facilities for the students of the four higher learning education centres, including a convention hall, multipurpose hall, a data centre, a library, a guesthouse and sports facilities.

"By sharing facilities between the campuses, we will see a higher utilisation rate, which will translate into cost savings," says Mohd Salem adding that the practice will also promote seamless social integration among the students and lecturers, resulting in an inter-varsity exchange of knowledge and expertise.

Pagoh Education Hub's design, development and operation will be in accordance with recognised national and international principles of sustainability. This will ensure any negative impact on the natural environment and ecology is minimised.

All buildings in the hub will be environmentally-friendly, using eco-friendly building materials and practices. A modular building construction method will be considered for flexibility of future extensions, and to expedite the construction process.

According to Mohd Salem, Sime Darby Property is planning to submit one of the university buildings for Green Building Index certification.



The development will also adopt responsible water resource management, such as rainwater harvesting and the recycling of treated sewage discharge for irrigation.

With the student villages located within walking distance of the universities, there will be less dependence on motorised transport, thus reducing the carbon footprint of the population while promoting a healthier and more balanced lifestyle.

Motorised transport within Pagoh Education Hub will be limited, while an extensive network of pedestrian walkways will be provided — with some of them sheltered from the elements. A centralised parking zone will also be provided, from which shuttle buses will ferry people around the campus.

The development is home to a sizeable water body which, will be used for water-based recreational and sporting activities, while creating a holistic learning environment for the students.

"We hope to have boat rowing contests between the institutions on the manmade river that runs through all the campuses," says Mohd Salem with a grin.

According to him, this idea was inspired by the annual rowing race between the boat clubs of Oxford University and Cambridge University on River Thames in London.

Sime Darby Property will also introduce a biofiltering system to the waterways of the development, which has been successfully applied to the developer's other townships. Using a carefully-selected range of aquatic plants and fish, it hopes to enhance the biodiversity of the area while creating a natural and sustainable ecosystem.

"We also hope that the waterways will attract migratory birds — such as the kingfisher, barn owl and crested southern eagle," says Mohd Salem, adding that more than 10% of the development will be open green space.

Bright future for Pagoh-Muar district

Bandar University Pagoh's (BUP) concept is unique to Malaysia. It sees the integration of a township with institutions of higher learning, the latter designed to minimise their impact on the topography of the surroundings and the existing communities.

BUP will be located off the Pagoh interchange along the North-South Expressway, and about 1km west of the town, which currently has a population of about 20,000.

"We see the population doubling by the time the township is developed," says Mohd Salem Kailany, Sime Darby's head of property development 2, adding that the communities there will reap economic and social benefits from BUP.

Pagoh Education Hub will be integral to the success of the BUP master plan. In turn, BUP will become a part of a world-class higher education corridor, supporting the Education Cluster of Selangor Vision Valley in the north and Educity in Nusajaya, Iskandar Malaysia, to the south.

The development of BUP will take 10 to 15 years, and will be done in three major phases. The first phase will span involve 600 to 1,000 acres and consist mainly of residential products. This will be followed by Phase 2 — a mix of residential and industrial properties on about 1,000 acres. The remaining areas, made up of commercial and thematic residential units, will be launched under Phase 3.

The largest component of the development are the residential areas (38%), followed by the hub (23%) and public amenities (more than 20%). The other components include a student village and small clusters of commercial and industrial lots.

Sime Darby hopes to launch the township's first residential component in early 2014. The residential units — mainly terraced and semi-detached houses and bungalows, will be priced at RM200,000 to RM500,000, depending on their type and size.

The success of the hub will be vital to attracting the establishment of branch campuses of international institutions of higher learning, while drawing the best and brightest students from all over the world.