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Having received a 99-year concession to develop a resort on Koh Rong Island in 2008, Cambodia's Royal Group conglomerate finally broke ground for a five-star hotel on 13 December after years of planning.

The hotel, which is a joint venture with a Thailand-based Swiss investor, will consist of 148 luxury rooms. The developer aims to complete the building in December 2016, said Khin Remy, an assistant to Kith Meng, chairman of Royal Group, according to a report in the Phnom Penh Post.

It is expected that once the hotel is completed, more and more tourists will pour to Sihanoukville for their beach holiday. Koh Rong is a stunning 78 sq.km island located 20km off the coast and has 29 beaches which stretch for 48km. According to the Cambodian Tourism Ministry, 47,000 tourists visited Koh Rong in the first three quarters of 2015, though local tourists accounted for only 17,000 of them.

The hotel is part of the first phase of the resort master plan called Royal Sands Koh Rong Resort. Developed by the Royal Group and designed by Hong Kong-based MAP Architects and design and engineering consultancy firm Scott Wilson Group Plc, the resort will become one of Asia's first environmentally planned and most luxurious tourist destinations. Thanks to the richness of its beautiful landscape, the New York Times listed Koh Rong as one of the 45 places to go in 2012.

"It is our shared vision that the island be planned and developed in a manner that results in the establishment of sustainable, commercially viable development model whilst preserving and enhancing the natural environment," said Royal Group Chairman Kith Meng on the company's website. "Koh Rong will become the destination on the South East Asian Riviera and a place for the enjoyment of both the Khmer people and foreign visitors alike."

As well as the first phase worth a total \$40 million, the Royal Group also plans for a \$10 million international airport to be built in middle of the island. The planned airport will take two years to build and will serve not only as the means to bring in local and international tourists but also investors interested in purchasing properties on the island. It will also welcome flights from Cambodia Airlines which opened two years ago and is owned by the Royal Group.

Alongside the potential for investments in hotel and resort developments on Koh Rong, there is scope for strategic investment in the island's infrastructure. The resort master plan also features road networks, a marina, a port, and various tourism and utility services.

According to company officials, the resort will take years to complete as the group is still seeking interested partners among leading resort and hotel brands and investors to invest in the development projects.

While the resort development is welcome news, it has been a big worry for the approximately 600 residents living on the island.

Speaking at the five-star hotel's ground breaking event on the island, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng reassured those affected people that the resort development will only benefit them and not hurt them, explaining that the government is working with the developer to launch the 'tiger skin' policy on the resort. This means villagers living on the sites of planned developments can remain on their land while the developer builds around their property.

Due to its geographic conditions that are free from serious natural disasters like hurricanes and tsunamis, Cambodia's islands are home to many tourist and real estate developments. According to the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC), almost 40 island development projects have been proposed to date though



many are inactive. Among them, Sang Saa Private Island, which opened to visitors in December 2012, and the Koh Pous Island development are the major developments.

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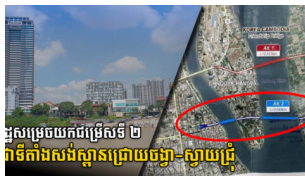
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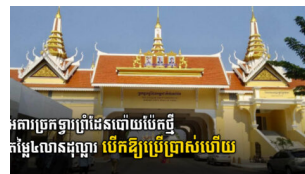
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