

## PROPERTY CHAT



# The power of quality service



BY AU FOONG YEE

cause of its consistently high service rating by customers.

## Quality service key to a developer's success

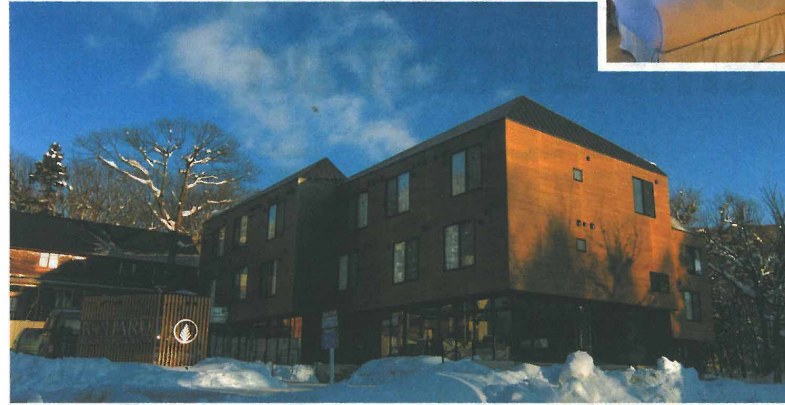
Quality service or customer experience is no longer the lifeline of the hospitality industry alone. In Malaysia, it is a distinct differentiator for property developers who want to stand out in a challenging environment.

What is quality service? Who sets the benchmark? It has to be the customer, of course.

The traditional principle of merely meeting customer expectations is archaic. Quality customer service is now about exceeding expectations. Wowing your customers like they have never been wowed before and we are not talking about the application of mere pure fluff disguised under public relations.

It is certainly not about the customer always being deemed right. But engaging with him/her and building a steadfast and ongoing relationship. This engagement process starts even before the customer decides to buy a property and right through to signing on the dotted line, taking vacant possession of the property and beyond.

When was the last time you walked into a developer's show



A 30 sq m studio unit at Koharu



It was yet another hot and humid afternoon on May 25. Datuk NK Tong was in his office in Kuala Lumpur's Mont' Kiara when an email flashed on his computer.

The message was short, but sweet. The Koharu Resort Hotel & Suites had been awarded the coveted Certificate of Excellence by TripAdvisor!

Koharu Resort Hotel & Suites in Hakuba, Japan is Bukit Kiara Properties Sdn Bhd's (BKP) first foray overseas. This ¥1.8 billion (RM66.8 million) development lies in the popular Japanese ski hub of Hakuba in Nagano, one of the host venues of the 1998 Winter Olympics.

Tong, group managing director of BKP (pictured), has every reason to be thrilled. TripAdvisor's Certificate of Excellence is awarded to hospitality businesses that have consistently received rave reviews by travellers for delivering superior customer experience the past year.

Despite being relatively new and a modest-sized outfit, Koharu Resort has received the thumbs up — all be-

cause of its consistently high service rating by customers.

gallery? Did the doorman (assuming there's one) greet you with a smile? Did members of the sales team immediately look up from what they were doing and give you a warm smile that made you feel right at home? Or maybe they assumed you were happy to idle away on your own among the imposing project models while they watched from a distance — which made you wonder whether it was because you were clad in shorts? Or that you were not brandishing an expensive watch on your wrist?

Were the sales personnel profes-



sionally trained in product knowledge? Or were they clearly there merely because they were rostered for duty that day?

Let's move on to property exhibitions — a popular occurrence these days. It is intriguing why some developers choose to invest in these shows only to showcase staff who display nonchalance.

Some developers appoint property agents to man exhibition booths. I have tried asking agents questions on the project showcased but I did not get all the answers sought.

As a consumer, I would have been more assured of the project had a representative of the developer been present, at least.

## Stay connected

Customer relationship managers who act as mere complaint bureau heads should be retired. They need to be proactive, not reactive. Buyers are entitled to feel important. They expect to be kept informed of the construction progress, on top of other forms of constant communication with the developer.

For me, the process of handing over a property must be the most telling of the level of a developer's customer service.

Some developers choose to rush through the process while others take pains to dote on the buyer, the buyer's comments and feedback.

What the developer does and does not do at this stage of the relationship with the buyer will stay in the minds of the latter for a long time.

A happy and satisfied buyer is a developer's best ambassador.

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## Koharu Resort receives TripAdvisor's Certificate of Excellence 2016

The Koharu Resort Hotel & Suites has been awarded the coveted Certificate of Excellence by TripAdvisor. This recognition is awarded to hospitality businesses that have consistently received rave reviews by travellers for delivering superior customer experience the past year.

Developed by Bukit Kiara Properties Sdn Bhd (BKP), Koharu has had three winter seasons since opening, and is now one of the top choices for skiers in Hakuba, the heart of the ski region which hosted the Nagano 1998 Winter Olympics.

Occupancy ranges from 80% to 90% in the winter season with many repeat customers booking as far as a year ahead. Already full for this coming Christmas and New Year, the resort is popular with nationalities from around the world and, in particular, Australians during their December and January holidays, and Hong Kong nationals, Singaporeans and Malaysians during the Chinese New Year holidays.

Upon full completion, Koharu (which means "early spring" in Japanese) will boast self-contained hotel suites atop a 0.6ha freehold plot. The units comprise studios, 1- and 2-bedroom apartments and 2-storey maisonettes.

In addition to the 16 apartment suites already in operation, the developer plans to build two 4-bedroom luxury villas for a client in the 2016-2017 season. Another three 4-bedroom terraced villas will follow in the 2017-2018 season, increasing the number of "keys" or rooms from the current 19 to 39. When fully completed, the resort will have between 70 and 80 keys.

BKP Properties has not been actively marketing the sales of this resort. Instead, the developer has chosen to focus on continual improvements in operations that NK Tong, group managing director of BKP, said have led to the Certificate of Excellence recognition by TripAdvisor.