

Over coffee with...

“The new brand...pays tribute to our mother, Kamala Sukosol, who built three hotels singlehandedly.”



Marisa Sukosol Nunbhakdi

Thai hotel company, Siam Hotels and Resorts, will be known as Sukosol Hotels from February 2012. The executive vice-president tells **Sirima Eamtako** why

Why is the company dropping Siam for Sukosol?

Siam is a generic name and people often confuse us with hotels with similar names or with Siam Square (a popular shopping area in Bangkok). However, Sukosol is our family name and the new brand marks the start of an era which will see everyone in the family working on a new hotel project – The Siam, Bangkok. The new brand also demonstrates our commitment to the business and pays tribute to our mother, Kamala Sukosol, who built three hotels singlehandedly. Lastly, it is time to build a new brand to serve our portfolio expansion.

The Sukosol family is renowned in the entertainment circle. Is that an advantage?

No. Clients look at the hotel's location, rooms, F&B offers and services to help them decide whether it fits their bill.

What changes will the new brand bring?

We will move from being sales-driven to brand-driven. Sukosol Hotels will drive awareness for all our brands by leveraging on its strength as a family-run business that offers unique products with great value.

Is a stronger branding necessary when the group has only three hotels?

By the second quarter of 2012, the Sukosol Hotels portfolio will grow from three properties to five in Bangkok and Pattaya. Each property will be unique. Market trends are pointing towards a rise in consumers accepting non-branded hotels, as well as increasing demand for unique hotels. Reactions to these trends are reflected in our investments including the renovation of existing properties and the development of new projects.

Sukosol Hotels will have a five-star hotel, The Sukosol (re-branded from Siam City Hotel Bangkok); a four-star hotel, The Bayview (rebranded from Siam Bayview Hotel Pattaya); an upper four-star hotel, Siam Bayshore Resort and Spa; an ultra luxury hotel, The Siam, Bangkok; and a boutique hotel, WAVE in Pattaya.

Which of these properties are new projects?

The Siam, Bangkok and WAVE. We are spending about 1.4 billion baht (US\$45 million) to develop The Siam, Bangkok on the banks of the Chao Phraya River. It will have 28 suites and 11 villas. When it opens in March, The Siam, Bangkok will be the city's most high-end hotel, with room rates starting from US\$500. The hotel is designed by world-renowned architect and interior/landscape designer, Bill Bensley, and it will have spaces for small events. The other new property, WAVE, is a Miami-chic boutique hotel in Pattaya. Built at a cost of 400 million baht, it will have 21 rooms and will open in April.

What changes are being made to existing hotels?

A 180-million-baht facelift is planned for The Siam City Hotel Bangkok, which will be rebranded as The Sukosol in June 2012. It will have refreshed public spaces, lobby and guestrooms, as well as new facilities such as meeting rooms, a lobby bar and bistro, a beer bar and a dining venue.

Siam Bayview Hotel Pattaya will be rebranded as The Bayview in July 2012, after a 90-million-baht facelift. The View, a new-build meeting room, six theme suites and two Siam Suites were completed in 2011, and works on the lobby and ocean view deluxe rooms will take place between April and June next year.

Another 50 million baht is set aside for back-of-house refurbishment and facade remodelling of Siam Bayshore Pattaya, the group's first hotel which had a major facelift some years ago.

With these new directions in place, are you looking at tapping new markets?

No one can resist the surge in arrivals from the BRIC markets (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Brazil may be geographically far from us, but we cannot ignore the growth potential of Russia, India and China. While we are still maintaining key markets – Europe and Japan, we plan to tap China with a market-specific sales team, India with a proactive sales approach, and Russia through partnerships with Russian tour operators.