

Dream Jobs on Dream Island

By Joakim Persson

Two globetrotters, one originating from Bangkok and the other from Stockholm, met in year 2000 on a live-aboard diving vessel by the Similan Islands outside southern Thailand. A few years later, after travelling the world together and taking various aspects of life into consideration, they decided to make Surin Beach Phuket their new home. Since 4 years back they now act as managing partners at the property brokerage firm Home2Thailand Exclusive Real Estate.

Met Robert Åkerblom and Sukanda Chiaranussati who have been able to combine living on a beautiful tropical island with the jobs of their dreams. They claim their working life is not how one traditionally might consider work, but more as a way of life, though they still take their professional roles very seriously. They are confronted daily by new situations, meet interesting clients and assist them in making their dreams come true. Could life be better?

The World's Our Oyster

It was their shared interest in diving, that brought Robert Åkerblom and Sukanda Chiaranussati together. Back then Robert was based in Gothenburg, Sweden, and Sukanda was based in London, UK.

By 2002 both had ended their contracts as consultants. They said "the world is our oyster, let's see what suitable locations for quality life and work it has to offer".

After a year travelling around the world they settled down in Sweden for two years prior to the eventual

move and spent considerable time in Thailand and Singapore researching and preparing for their move to Phuket, which was their final choice.

"Already back in 2002 Phuket was in our view changing quite rapidly. We felt that there was a growing interest and understood that numerous persons seemed to consider the island a suitable location for investment or retirement."

Robert, who after studies in construction engineering and virtual reality had held positions within Harley Davidson Scandinavia, Volvo Cars

and Saab Aerospace in the Gripen project, and he had earlier been a frequent Asia traveller in a garment venture that included sourcing and manufacturing.

Their joint decision to move to Thailand was based on a number of factors.

"Both of us have always been interested in real estate and architecture. Currently real estate brokerage is the main focus of our firm but we are actively working in the direction of a role as a developer," says his partner.

"As brokers, we have seen it all, at times both with fascination and astonishment," Robert says. Pay him a visit and he might elaborate on that topic...

The current market

"Since the start of the economic turmoil developers have been more reluctant to launch or re-scheduled the completion of already initiated projects. They are in many cases adopting a wait-and-see position."

"Projects are still launching but mainly in the low to mid-end market

segment where location and quality most often don't match our customers requirements," says Robert.

"It's not only developers being cautious about investing, buyers also have concerns if developers will be able to complete their projects. Since this is an all cash market we're in a Catch 22; if smaller or under financed developers are not fortunate with their sales there is a risk that the projects will not be completed," Sukanda explains.



Robert and Sukanda believe, however, that the property market of Phuket will continue to expand and also continue its move into the Phang Nga and Krabi provinces. Sectors like marinas, healthcare and MICE will most likely see a continuously healthy growth. But obviously the global economic downturn is felt.

“For the upper mid- to high end the demand will continue to be on the rise in the light of location and lifestyle. The villas and condos, new or re-sale, with close proximity to the beaches with gorgeous views and within well maintained estates will continue to attract affluent individuals,” says Robert.

“However, being a foreign-driven market developers must acknowledge that customers may require mortgages from abroad in order to invest in Thailand and that banks currently are reluctant to lend which means potential clients are less likely to enter any purchases.”

Financing

“Financing is an issue that we find is very important to discuss with clients quite early. The dream of a home in the sun is there but the financial part may not have been fully understood or carefully considered. Since Thailand predominantly is a cash market, if you don’t have that then one of the only other options would be payment plans offered by some developers,” says Robert.

“However, when you reach investment levels of 1-2 million US dollars, the amount spent on a third or fourth home might only represent 5-10 per cent of your total assets. When trading those types of properties clients are normally used to making



decisions,” adds Robert.

“We leave the contract details to the lawyers and financial advisers who have to advise the client but in terms of the basics, we will explain the general structures of the legal framework.”

As for due diligence, Home2Thailand Exclusive Real Estate play their part in ensuring that developments are sound from an early stage and keep in regular contact with the developers.

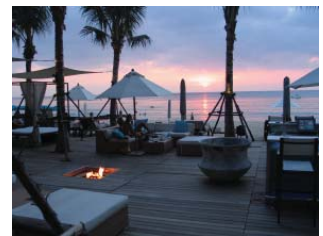
Personalised service

“Our niche is to provide very personalised services for our clients, from initial contact to often long after they have taken possession of their properties,” says Sukanda

“Different types of investors have various requirements, our challenge is to understand and cater for their their needs and that is what we try to accomplish. First we try to make sure we fully understand their objectives. Then we present a selection of developments at various locations, point out advantages/ possible disadvantages, and narrow down the list to the once most suitable,” says Sukanda.

“Our reputation is very important to us. We want our clients to tell their friends that “these guys will carefully consider your situation and then give you honest advice and present suitable options,” adds Robert

When asked to sums up their basic advice to new buyers on the market,



they put it like this:

“Always go with reputable agents and seek advice from credible legal advisers. We are not saying that everyone out there consciously intends to cheat you but as a buyer you need to fully understand the whole picture before making such a substantial investment as purchasing a property.”