

# Opportunities aren't seized sleeping

**A**rise! The nap you've taken from property is over and it's time to wake up and smell the coffee.

Oh sure, you've probably got a million-and-one excuses for not wanting to and most certainly, you can hit the snooze button and roll over, hoping to find a cool spot to continue your slumber. But for how long can you lull yourself with notions that continually rising prices and the absence of fresh incentives means you can afford ignoring its call? At best, you've only got until Chinese New Year; after that, there'll be so much busyness going on you'd look a bit silly in your pyjamas while others are in their suits.

What I like to do on days I can afford to laze in bed – which isn't often – is to pick up the book I dropped the night before and continue reading. If you're like me, you might have read that the rest of the world has already woken up – not only to the prospect of property investment, but more precisely, property investment in Malaysia.

Without any compulsion, Hong Kong-based property investment company IP Global recently ranked Kuala Lumpur as among the top destinations to buy property this year.

"After almost a decade of preferring London, Singapore and New York, Hong Kongers are now turning their sights on KL," it said.

Putting our capital ahead of even New York City and London – finally, KL is mentioned in the same breath as these two illustrious cities – its founder Tim Murphy pointed out that our property market is "driven by owner occupiers and domestic consumption, not pure

rampant speculation like many parts of Asia".

With our stable, well-regulated market and relative affordability, he recommended that investors looking for long-term, secure opportunities should explore what's available on our shores.

Hong Kong's prices are typically five times more expensive than KL's, Murphy said, adding that over the past 12 months, prices here increased by only three per cent compared with 25 per cent in Hong Kong and 38 per cent in Singapore.

"The lack of supply of mid to luxury condominiums, however, means prices will increase over time," he said.

For IP Global's second and third picks, Murphy said NYC was chosen for its low property prices but strong growth story and robust economy which has enabled it to rebound faster than any US city, while for London, "low interest rates and high rental yields will offer strong value over the next 12 to 18 months".

Back in KL, I think the place that is poised for a rebound is the arena centred around the KLCC, which includes Ampang.

Over the past two years, the luxe condos in this locality have taken a price hammering with the absence of foreign investors and tenants causing a 30 per cent drop in values.

However, valuer Eric Ooi of Knight Frank Ooi Zaharin and Partners said last year while announcing the Fourth Malaysian Property Summit that he expects a "return of buyer interest from Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Middle East" due partly to the higher yields attainable from highrise units in

the locale compared to landed properties.

The Summit organised by the Association of Valuers, Property Managers, Estate Agents & Property Consultants in the Private Sector or PEPS will be held on Tues, Jan 18th.

Reinforcing Ooi's view of KLCC was PEPS past president James Wong, who said the implementation of the government's Economic Transformation Programme should create an influx of expatriates to KL similar to what happened when the Petronas Twin Towers was under construction.

"Come 2011, we will see whether foreign interest will be better than ... the peak in 2007/2008," Wong was quoted as saying by the media.

With the current low prices in KLCC – I know for a fact a newly completed five-star condo along leafy Kia Peng can be bought for less than RM1,000psf – but the expected return to form, this might be the first place awakening investors should examine.

Keeping eyes closed for just that bit longer could lead to missed opportunities.

