

Auspicious opening for Sentosa IR

But no word yet on when casino, theme park will begin business



Tan Sri Lim, chairman of RWS and Genting Group, giving the thumbs up to the opening of the IR yesterday along with Mr Tan, chief executive of RWS. ST PHOTO: TERENCE TAN

BY LIM WEI CHEAN & MAVIS GOH

THE first-phase opening of Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) yesterday was timed to the minute – 8.18am. After all, the word “eight” sounds like “prosper” in Cantonese.

At precisely that time, the red ribbons strung across the entrance of Crockfords Tower – the most luxurious hotel at RWS – were cut, and traditional Chinese lions pranced to the beat of drums.

Another three hotels – the Hard Rock Hotel, Festive Hotel and Hotel Michael – were also declared open.

Top RWS officials were at the opening of Singapore’s first integrated resort (IR), about 3½ years after the country awarded the first casino contract. The other IR, Marina Bay Sands, will open by April.

Five retail shops and 10 restaurants and lounges also welcomed their first real guests.

RWS chief executive Tan Hee Teck and chairman Lim Kok Thay said they were extremely happy to have delivered on their promise to open in the first quarter of the year.

But when the Universal Studios theme park and the casino will open is still unknown.

Mr Tan said that next to open will be Festive Walk, RWS’ retail and dining strip, then the theme park and the casino. But he gave no time frame.

Tan Sri Lim, who is also chairman of RWS parent company Genting Group, when asked to clarify reports which quoted him as having said the theme park will open next week, said he had been misunderstood.

He said he meant that RWS’ other facilities, including the theme park

and the casino, “will follow on from next week onwards”.

He added that it is hoped they would be ready by Chinese New Year, but this depends on when the authorities give them the green light.

Universal Studios is checking to see that the rides are up to standard, Mr Lim said. As for the casino, RWS is waiting for its licence to be approved, given that it has met the necessary requirements for the permit.

A Casino Regulatory Authority spokesman confirmed the application was in the works, and that the licence would be awarded in due course.

Meanwhile, visitors started streaming in yesterday to gawk. Housewife Angeline Teo, 33, said: “I have to admit this place is not Las Vegas yet, but it is definitely better than any resort I have seen in South-east Asia.” Investor Ricky Wong, 60, who is

wheelchair-bound, said he thought the signage could be improved and the carpark more disabled-friendly.

RWS spokesman Lim Soon Hua said the public’s response to the hotels has been good: All four are 80 per cent booked for the weekends from now until March. During the Chinese New Year period, they will be full.

Industry players such as Royal Plaza on Scotts general manager Patrick Fiat expect the two IRs’ opening to boost hotel occupancy and room rates, which were depressed last year because of the global recession.

He added that the IRs will draw more visitors than they can handle, so other hotels will benefit from the spillover. “The main thing everyone is waiting for now is the opening of the theme park,” he said.

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The Hard Rock Hotel's swimming pool is one of the biggest at hotels in Singapore. There is real sand, imported from Australia, lining the floor around the pool, giving the resort a beach-like feel. One section of the pool also has a sand-covered base. ST PHOTO: SAMUEL HE

S. Korea park ‘not a threat’

GENTING Group chairman Lim Kok Thay yesterday sounded a bullish note about the Universal Studios theme park at Resorts World Sentosa (RWS), in the face of the movie giant’s plans to open a mega park in South Korea.

Eighteen of the 24 rides and attractions in the Singapore park will be exclusive to it, so the park – although a lot smaller – will have its own unique power to draw visitors here, he said.

Universal Studios announced this week that South Korea would be the site of its biggest theme park in Asia. Mr Lim, who is also RWS chairman, said the South Korean project would strengthen the Universal Studios brand and make visitors to the South Korean park want to check out the Singapore one.

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