



Makkah and Madinah real estate sector buoyant amid global financial crisis - Alpha1Estates

London, UK, 1 January 2009/ 4 Muharram 1430: Global Islamic real estate consultancy Alpha1Estates International said on January 1 and in the new Islamic new year of 1430 that property investment in the Holy Cities of Makkah and Madinah next year will continue to boom, despite the global financial crisis hitting most real estate markets around the world.

The company, which launched to global acclaim on January 1 2006, said that despite the downward trend and corrections most markets will experience, the real estate sector in the Holy Cities is likely to buck the general downward trend in 2009 CE/ 1430 AH and continue appreciating in value.

"Prophet Muhammad, may the peace and blessings be upon him, counselled Muslims about the immense spiritual blessings of living in the Holy Cities," said Talal Mahmood Malik al-Alawi, CEO of Alpha1Estates International. "But even in this most cherished of spiritual investments, there are sound financial reasons to invest in future living in Makkah al-Mukarramah and al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, particularly during the global financial crisis."

The main reasons why Muslim real estate investors should seek to invest in the Holy Cities now, Mr. Talal said, is inelastic and rising global demand from the world's billion and a half-plus Muslims, supported by significant public and private sector investment in infrastructure, both for the Grand Mosques and transport to them.

Alpha1Estates International launched in 2006 to become the world's first company to market property in both Makkah and Madinah, with its projects ZamZam Tower, Makkah, Abraj al-Bait, Makkah, Hajar Tower, Makkah and Taiba Eastern Tower, Madinah all centrally located near the two Holy Mosques, and in subsequent years has launched the world's first bespoke real estate consultancy programme and joint-investment fund focused on the Holy Cities.

Mr. Talal also said that ten million Muslim pilgrims from 140 countries visit the Holy Cities annually for Hajj and Umrah, contributing 20 billion riyals (\$5.3 billion) per year, the second-most lucrative source of the Kingdom's revenue after oil.

Real estate investment in Makkah and Madinah accounts for 40% of total real estate investments in the Kingdom, reflected in land prices in the Holy Cities being the most expensive in the world at between \$70,000 and \$110,000 per sq. metre.

The Grand Mosque in Makkah in 2008 and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah in 2006 have undertaken multi-billion dollar expansion and infrastructure investment programmes, the CEO added.

Air transport to the Holy Mosques is also being boosted with the expansion of the Jeddah International Airport for Makkah and the Prince Mohammed bin Abdulaziz International Airport in Madinah, whilst ground transport is being transformed with the creation of the Makkah-Madinah Railway Link - where the near 4-hour journey will be priced for pilgrims at 60 riyals (\$16).

Mr. Talal also said that the general macro-view of Saudi Arabia's real estate market is favourable, as demonstrated by global real estate company Jones Lang LeSalle ranking the kingdom sixth globally in terms of increased real estate transparency between 2006 and 2008. Alpha1Estates International advised Jones Lang LeSalle in 2007 on how to enter the Saudi Arabian real estate market.

2008 CE/ 1429 AH has been an immensely successful year for Alpha1Estates International, Mr. Talal said, with the company's reputation in the Middle East and globally enhancing without a doubt.

In January, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah officially approved the expansion of the Grand Mosque's northern courtyard, coming more than two years after the CEO exclusively revealed the expansion plans on the company's international television debut in December 2005.

On February 2, the CEO of Alpha1Estates International was a VIP guest of the Government of Dubai and became the first person to fly over The World islands in Dubai following their completion, Burj Dubai after the world's tallest building's height had exceeded 600 metres and also over then-unknown Atlantis Hotel on The Palm Jumeirah Islands. A stunning photograph of the landmark helicopter journey has been accepted as an entry in the prestigious international photography competition, Picture of the Year.

In May, the CEO led a prestigious regional media-initiative to promote the achievements of Arabian Businesswomen which featured the Khadijah bint Khuwailid Businesswomen's Centre in Jeddah and its CEO Dr. Basma Omair. The media initiative also featured Muna AbuSulayman, whose roles at the United Nation Development Programme, the Alwaleed bin Talal Kingdom Foundation, MBC, and her new fashion business venture make her one of the world's most influential Arabian women.

In June, the CEO became the first person in the Middle East to be featured in prime Arabic media for undertaking the latest extensive DNA-genealogy testing procedures. From June 22-24, the CEO was a VIP guest of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Government, the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) and the Governorate of Madinah at the inaugural Noor Conference about the Knowledge Economic City (KEC), Madinah.

In November, the CEO was a prime delegate at the World Islamic Banking Conference in Bahrain, where he conducted his first major exclusive interview in

Arabic with Bahrain's leading newspaper, Al-Waqt, prioritising it ahead of major television interview opportunities with Reuters International, CNBC Arabiya and al-Jazeera. The interview resulted in a front-page world-exclusive news story about the global Islamic finance sector.

In December, the CEO conducted his second major interview in Arabic, leading a prestigious news story about the global Islamic finance sector in pan-Arab daily newspaper, Asharq al-Awsat.

Over the past year, the CEO Mr. Talal Mahmood Malik al-Alawi has met the following dignitaries relating to the work of Alpha1Estates International in Islamic real estate and finance:

- * HRH Prince Abdul Aziz bin Majed, the Governor of Madinah
- * Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, Director of Zaytuna College
- * Mr. Muhammad Yunus, Grameen Bank founder, microfinance expert and Nobel Peace Prize Winner 2006
- * Mr. Jack Welch, former Chairman and CEO of General Electric and Fortune Magazine's 'CEO of the Century'
- * Mr. Rushdi Siddiqui - Global Director of the Dow Jones Islamic Indexes

Alpha1Estates International: <http://www.alpha1estates.com>

Contact:

Ms. Aisha Imam
Public Relations Director
Alpha1Estates International HQ
Marble Arch Tower
55 Bryanston Street
London
W1H 7AJ
United Kingdom

Tel: (44) 207 0609 786

Fax: (44) 207 1171 586

Email: a.imam@alpha1estates.com