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[BY AMY TAN]

A row of French Tricolours, fluttering in the gentle breeze, brighten up a bridge over a sidewalk with their red, white and blue, while tourists below enjoy an al fresco breakfast of coffee and croissants. A few streets away, visitors take a rest under the cool wings of an angel adorning a fountain. Paris? Piccadilly? Wrong. You are at The Scene at Batam.

As a filmmaker, Mike Wiluan, CEO of media entertainment and creative services company Infinite Studios, has always believed that making movies is about bringing stories to life as a shared visual experience. And The Scene will take storytelling to a new level, says Wiluan.

The Scene at Batam is a 60-year leasehold holiday resort inspired by classic European architecture and developed jointly by Infinite Studios and Landstar Development. Designed by architect Piter Gan and Hollywood scenic artist Peter Collias, the development will span 340,142 sq ft and have 295 low-rise condotel units comprising studios, one- and two-bedroom apartments and suites as well as 50 retail spaces.

"The Scene's unique concept stems from the strong demand we are seeing in Asia for movie production, with more international directors now choosing to come to this region," says Wiluan.

According to him, Batam has a bustling film production community, with companies from the US and Europe working with Infinite Studios to produce their films there. "We have projects that range from one to three months and our partners range from stunt companies to make-up and special effects companies. They feel that being based in Batam is a long-term benefit for them. So, they have said that they want to be a part of this community."

At the same time, Wiluan has also noted an increase in tourist numbers to Batam. The Citramas Group, which Infinite Studios is a part of, has been in Batam for 30 years. Under the group's leisure business, it owns and operates the Turi Beach Resort, Nongsa Point Marina, Taman Indah Nongsa Village, Tamarin Santana Golf Course and the Nongsapura Ferry Terminal. "Our intention is to constantly evolve our development in Batam. We have established a foundation for us to create other properties and it has become a natural instinct for us to do, but we want to make sure that every property is unique," says Wiluan, who also serves as chairman of the Singapore International Film Festival as well as managing director of Nongsa Resorts.



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He observes that over the last few years, there has been a diversification in the type of tourists Batam attracts. "Our mid-week occupancies have been driven up by a lot of corporate clients whereas the weekend attracts the free and easy traveller. We are also getting a lot of young travellers who are looking for a quick getaway from Singapore," he says. "Tour groups are still going there but, in addition to tourists from the region, we have tourists from North Asia, Europe and Australia."

The Scene is conceived as a vacation home for tourists as well as the film produc-

tion community. When Infinite Studios first thought about the concept, the group had already built a Chinatown shophouse set for the filming of HBO Asia's detective noir series *Serangoon Road*.

The Scene will have a Movie Town that is an extension of the original Chinatown outdoor film set. Instead of shophouses, Movie Town will feature landscapes inspired by European architecture. "We're avoiding the theme park concept where you have very clean, fresh looks. The difference here is that we have residents and we are also using the space for filming.

So, there is great attention to detail to give the impression of an old world town," he says.

When The Scene is completed in December 2018, Wiluan estimates that two to three feature films and one TV series could be shot there a year. "I don't want to be too bullish because, ultimately, my aim is to ensure that the liveability scores are always reached. It's nice to be able to tell people that the façade of your home has appeared in a TV show or film," he says.

To be sure, Infinite Studios has been heavily involved in developing the film production scene in Batam. Since acquiring Infinite Studios in 2004, Wiluan has set about establishing Indonesia's first large-scale international animation studio in Batam that has produced notable shows such as *Garfield*, *Franklin and Friends* and *Peter Rabbit*. In 2011, Infinite Studios developed the largest film studio in Southeast Asia at Batam. Most notably, the studio's production services arm facilitated Michael Mann's most recent feature *Cyber*, filmed in Jakarta in August 2013.

Wiluan has always been fascinated by movies. "My father was an early video distributor in Indonesia and I became interested in movies because of him," says Wiluan, who is the son of Indonesian tycoon Kris Wiluan. He recalls growing up with stacks of VHS tapes stored in his house before they were distributed to oil rigs. "Every day, my brother and I would just watch a different movie after we came back from school and, by the time we were nine years old, we had a good sense of what the different genres of movies were," he adds.

Thus it was no surprise to his parents that he decided to pursue filmmaking as a career. "Watching films is a pastime that my family appreciated. So, when I said I was going to film school, it wasn't discouraged. In fact, it was encouraged," he says. However, Wiluan notes that coming from a monied background did not guarantee success in film-making.

Some notable shows Wiluan has produced are Southeast Asia's first English animated feature *Sing to the Dawn* as well as *My Magic* and *Be With Me*, which were both directed by Eric Khoo and featured at the Cannes Film Festival. He also produced Royston Tan's *881* and *12 Lotus*.

"After graduating from film school, I worked as a production assistant for a number of years and had to endure very tough circumstances without any pay. You can develop your craft only by having a great attitude. That's where you start off and that's the process I went through myself," says Wiluan.

