

Keys to attracting Asian investors: AREAA panel

Besides targeting China, developers can look to Japan and to Chinese residents of Canada

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Miami's skyline from December 2011 (Credit: John Spade) and the Chinese flag

When it came time for Paramount Miami Worldcenter developer Daniel Kodsi to implement an aggressive marketing strategy in China for the luxury condo, he had to hire a public relations firm based in Hong Kong to pitch stories to Chinese news outlets, he told an audience of about 300 attendees inside an Intercontinental Miami hotel meeting room on Friday.

“The buyers like to see press articles written in Chinese,” Kodsi said. “It gives projects a certain level of credibility.”

After traveling to China to participate in the The Real Deal’s U.S. Real Estate Showcase & Forum in Shanghai, Kodsi offered his take on what the local real estate industry has

to do to lure Chinese buyers, during a panel discussion about South Florida's luxury real estate sector at the launch event for the Greater Miami chapter of the Asian Real Estate Association, or AREAA. Roughly 13 percent of the buyers who have bought pre-sale units at Paramount are Chinese, he said.

Joining Kodsi were Reid Boren, one of the developers of the Biscayne Beach and Elysse condos in Edgewater; Masoud Shojaee, who is co-developing The Collection Residences in Coral Gables with Ugo Colombo; Andreas Ioannou, CEO of the Ocean Resort Residences in Ft. Lauderdale; and Nikol Solares, sales director for Turnberry Associates.

According to Kodsi, Chinese buyers are uninformed about Miami. "When I was out there last week, people I met think 'CSI Miami'," Kodsi said, referring to the TV crime drama that was largely filmed in Los Angeles despite its title. "That is the perception," he added. "I feel we need to put together a program that educates buyers [in China] about Miami."

Ioannou concurred, noting local quasi-public agencies that are tasked with promoting South Florida should take on the responsibility of ramping up missions to the Far East. "It is very important that tourism boards do a lot of the leg work to promote the value of Miami, not just in China, but all of Asia," Ioannou said. "I know the Greater Fort Lauderdale tourism bureau has done a couple of missions to China to promote. We are also meeting with group that wants to do charter flights from China into Miami and Fort Lauderdale."

Shojaee said the development community should also consider investors from Japan. "We have sold over \$80 million to Japanese groups," Shojaee said. "I have traveled to Japan three, four times in the past 12 months."

He also paid the airfare for some of his Japanese buyers to fly to Miami. "I had one-on-one meetings with them," Shojaee said. "They love what we are doing."

During an earlier panel discussion called "Understanding the Asian Buyer," Tina Mak, the founding president of AREAA Vancouver chapter said Miami's development community should consider targeting Chinese buyers in Canada.

"Canada is a gateway for them to come to the U.S.," Mak said. "It will be easier because they are already westernized."

When she arrived in Vancouver in 1991, the city's Chinese population was 300 people, Mak said. Today, there are more than 400,000 Chinese in Vancouver.

With Chinese firms like American Da Tang Group investing in Miami, it made sense to open a local chapter, said Carmen Chong, the 2015 AREAA national chairwoman. "Asians have been eyeing Miami for a while," she said. "Miami is a city with such high energy and excellent education offerings. We are ecstatic to launch this new chapter."

