

Yabuli ski resort all set for launch

Club Med is coming to China. In November, the mainland's first ski resort, Club Med Yabuli, will open near Harbin in Heilongjiang province.

Olivier Horps, Club Med's managing director for Asia-Pacific, says the French company is committed to building four more resorts on the mainland by the end of 2015.

"I'm quite often in China to look for new resort locations and new partners. I've been to a small island - I won't say where," he says, with a coy smile.

However, he adds that the company is looking in the south and that "Hainan is one" place.

After Yabuli, a beach resort on the mainland appears to be Club Med's next priority.

Horps was in Hong Kong recently for a party to mark Club Med's 60th anniversary and the Yabuli launch. He is excited about the company's future on the mainland and says: "I've been amazed to discover [the country's] nature. There are some parts of China that are really unspoiled."

Club Med CEO Henri Giscard d'Estaing says: "China is a major growth driver for Club Med, potentially representing 200,000 customers by 2015. It could become the group's second-largest market after France."

After Yabuli opens on November 27, Club Med will have nine resorts around



Club Med Yabuli (above) brings Canadian design to Heilongjiang province, says its spokesman Olivier Horps (right).

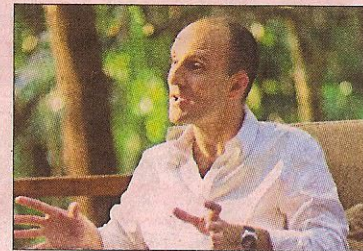
the Asia-Pacific region. "We have a mix and will continue to do lots of upgrades, improvements and innovations," Horps says.

"In some areas where we are doing very well, such as the Maldives, we are

thinking of having a second resort." Yabuli will be classified as a four-trident resort (five is the highest rating) and will contain 284 rooms, including 27 suites with views of the surrounding mountains.

The resort will have direct access to the slopes, spa facilities, an indoor swimming pool and a fitness centre.

It was designed by a Canadian architect and Horps says "you feel like you're in a luxury Canadian hotel rather



than in China, except you have to have a beautiful Chinese restaurant".

The general manager is from New Zealand, the head chef is from Mauritius and the staff will be Chinese, giving the resort a genuine international flavour. Guests are expected to be expatriates and well-heeled mainlanders.

It is not yet fully booked but reservations are speeding up, Horps says.

Yabuli will also provide a variety of Heilongjiang and international cuisines, including French dishes from the Alps. "The French desserts always work," Horps adds.

The resort will include 17 slopes for different levels of skiers. "It's in an interesting place because it's where the Chinese Olympic team goes to train. It's good at all levels.

"The resort is unique. It's very different from anything that has existed so far in China," Horps says.