SINGAPORE: Experts suggest villas and marine park as development possibilities for the Southern Islands.

This comes after the Singapore Tourism Board revealed it wants to get ideas on how to develop the six islands. They include the Kusu, St John's and Sisters' Islands.

Islands like Kusu and St John's are currently popular with campers or day-trippers looking to make a short getaway.

The islands, about one hour away from the mainland, ooze rustic charm with minimal facilities. And talks of developing them have generated much excitement.

Lynne Ireland, Vice President of Marketing (Asia Pacific), Small Luxury Hotels of the World, says: "Look for something unique - develop villas. You will have the clientele coming through and honestly with Singapore, that will actually enhance the experience and enhance Singapore as a gateway destination by having these additional escapes without too much commercialisation within the region."

"The thing is to develop them correctly and to develop the right infrastructure and the right properties to make a difference and then really set Singapore on the map."

Assistant Professor Tomoki Fujii, School of Economics and Social Sciences at Singapore Management University, says: "One of the possibilities is to develop a marine park, where divers and snorkellers come and enjoy the pristine marine environment there."

"Another option is to develop a sort of resort for retirees, where people can enjoy semi-pristine environment. Maybe you can build wooden cottages and things like that so you can have quite good natural environment while enjoying the proximity to the city."

Singapore does not have much greenery because buildings are spread across the city.

So experts feel it is best to preserve the natural landscape of the six tropical islands while developing them. That way, the islands will complement the attractions and facilities on the mainland.

Morgan Parker, President of Taubman Asia, says: "I think there's tremendous opportunity to take advantage of the topography, that natural environment that the islands provide. Education is a very important leisure activity in this part of the world. So these islands may present a beautiful canvass for the creation of edu-tainment if you like."

The challenge is to create attractions on the islands while drawing visitors back to the mainland to encourage more spending. - CNA/so