



auction professionally and there was concern we wouldn't even be able to find three potential buyers in advance.

"In the end, we just carried it out as we do all land use sales," she added.

According to the country's Island Protection Law, which took effect in March 2010, individuals and companies can only use the islands for up to 50 years after obtaining approval from local governments and ecologists.

Getting that permission, however, does not mean developers have the freedom to do whatever they want.

"I received a phone call from an interested party one day who was asking about turning an island into a industrial base," said Jin. "I turned him down immediately."

Zhejiang has about 2,900 islands, each with an area of 500 to 1,000 square meters. More than 90 percent are uninhabited.

Although the State Oceanic Administration's decision to open Chinese islands to developers stoked excitement, few local governments have so far been able to seal deals.

"We've had 10 islands on the market since April, but not a single one has been leased out," said Ni Dingkang, an ocean and fisheries official in Zhoushan, the only prefecture-level city in China made up entirely of islands.

"The reason is mainly due to the high rent and poor condition of these islands."