

Now, a mall in the hills



Artist's image of the upcoming mall in Lonavala.

Lonavala, a hilltop tourist destination, is to get a 1.5 lakh sq.ft mall.

S. Shanker

Now malls appear to be tracking tourists. A 1.5 lakh sq.ft mall at a cost of Rs 100 crore is coming up in Lonavala, a hilltop tourist destination that is an hour's drive from Mumbai.

A 'mall mechanic' is in the forefront of this development, who says that the research has it that on an average 62,000 visitors come to Lonavala during weekends — Friday through Sunday — annually.

Beyond Squarefeet, a boutique mall advisory company, has bagged the project being developed by Dhanlaxmi Builders and Developers.

"Hill towns like Darjeeling, Mussoorie, Shimla, Nainital, all have a 'mall road', while Lonavala, in spite of being frequented by people from Pune and Mumbai, does not have it. We wanted to create a mall which will cater to the local population and also generate business opportunity for the locals," says Mr Sunil Sangoi, Managing Partner of Dhanlaxmi Developers.

TENANT MIX

"The challenge in this project is that, it is based in a Tier III town, yet catering to the urbanites from major cities. The tenant mix of this mall would be an ideal mix of domestic and national retailers," said Mr Susil Dunganwal, Chief Mall Mechanic.

Beyond Squarefeet has managed mall development and operations of over 30 million sq.ft across the country. Some of its key projects include Forum Malls (Bangalore, Chennai, Mangalore, Hyderabad and Kochi), UB City Mall, DLF Malls and Shoppers Stop.

Sixty-five per cent of the crowd that frequent Lonavala are from Mumbai

and Pune, who come to the hilltop almost thrice a year for just the weather, greenery and ambience. Favourite picnic spots are no longer a draw for them after their second or third visit. The visitors tend to laze around and relax. The tourist flow is good and the mall has also been designed to cater to the local population of Lonavala, Khanda-la, Khopoli and Talegaon as well, he said.

To make it relevant to the locals as well, the mall will have a three screen multiplex, a 20,000 sq.ft family entertainment centre that will have high-tech rides, kiosks and gaming, and a multi-cuisine food court spread over 21,000 sq.ft with over 13 kitchens. Of course the local flavour will be provided with 'vadapav' and 'bhel' joints, not to mention the 'chikki' stores.

In retail, apart from fashion anchors and vanilla stores, a super market big enough to draw the local population has been planned. Focus is on low maintenance cost and the company plans to peg it in single digit.

Mr Dunganwal said the revenue expectation was Rs 12,000 a sq.ft. Anchor tenants get concessions and pan India ones are free to work on revenue-sharing models as well. The mall is expected to be operational early next year.

ENTERTAINMENT, THE KEY

Mr Monesh Bhojwani, AVP - Retail Services, Jones Lang LaSalle Meghraj, however has his apprehensions. He feels Lonavala is not a good location for a shopping mall, no matter how fine-tuned the tenant mix may be.

The local population is definitely not oriented towards this format of shopping, and the transient weekend crowd from Mumbai and Pune comes to Lonavala for a touch of natural splendour, relaxation and entertainment. The only format that would work for such a catchment would be a full-fledged entertainment complex to rival the already existing ones.