

The Mantri 'shopping experience'

With 252 retail outlets, the mall has brought international, national and even local brands literally to the doorstep of the residents of Malleswaram, Bangalore.

**Anjana Chandramouly
Swetha Kannan**

The advertisements across the city claim it to be the largest mall in the country. Largest or not, at 1.7 million sq.ft Mantri Square in Bangalore, surely, is one of India's largest malls.

"Mantri Square will undoubtedly be the most sought after destination amongst discerning shoppers and retailers alike. The sheer scale of offerings at the mall comes second only to the detailing that has gone into ensure a world-class shopping, leisure and entertainment destination," said Mr Sushil Mantri, Chairman and Managing Director, Mantri Developers, at a recent press conference.

The mall is located at Malleswaram, a residential locality in West Bangalore, in the premises of the erstwhile Raja Mills. Investment into this mall stands at Rs 500 crore, including Rs 100 crore paid for the land.

"Residents of West and North Bangalore had to go to the central business district or beyond for malls," Mr Mantri explained on the choice of the location. What he hopes would help bring in more people to the mall is the Namma Metro project. "The proposed metro station of Namma Metro will be located at the mall on the second floor, connecting the other parts of the city directly to the mall once operational," he said.

Work on the Metro station is expected to start soon, and it will take two years for the station to be ready. "Once that is done, we can expect shoppers from other far-away localities of the city too," said Mr Mantri. The station is being developed on a public-private partnership model, he added. Besides, the developer has also taken up road widening work behind the mall, by providing 20 ft from the project premises.

RESIDENTIAL TO RETAIL HUB

With a mall of this scale and size in their locality, the residents of Malleswaram need to look no further for all their shopping needs. With 252 retail



An investment of Rs 500 crore has been pumped into Mantri Square. — G. R. N. Somashekhar

outlets, including 39 F&B outlets, the mall has brought international, national and even local brands literally to their doorstep.

The mall has six anchor stores — the country's largest Spar Hypermarket outlet at 90,000 sq.ft, Lifestyle, Shoppers' Stop, Pantaloon, Reliance Trends and Marks & Spencer.

And jostling with them for attention are local retail brands that have been hand-picked from some of the shopping destinations of the city. So, you can find Fazal's and Lal's Matching Centre (from Commercial Street), Kushal's and Neeru's (from Jayana-

gar). Mr B.S. Nagesh, Managing Director, Shoppers' Stop, says that Malleswaram is not a "middle-class locality any more like it was 15-20 years ago. The second generation of Malleswaram is much more modern today than the previous generation. The profile of the place has changed, the density of young population has increased."

Are retail chains such as Shoppers' Stop looking to attract people from far-away areas to the outlet in Mantri Mall? Not really, says Mr Nagesh, who sees a big potential market in Malleswaram itself. "Our core customers will come from within five km of Malleswaram. We expect people in the 5-8

km radius to come here once in two months. But when the Metro opens, we expect even people from a 10-km distance to frequent our store in Mantri Mall."

C FOR CONVENIENCE

Moreover, shopping is made more easy, for the mall adopts the practice of zoning for retailers, where similar product categories are located together for shoppers' convenience. "We have tried to have at least five brands in each product category for the customer to choose from," said Mr Mantri.

What could also set apart the shopping experience at this mall are its wide corridors. "The corridors are almost 40-ft wide. So even if the mall is crowded, people wouldn't feel so," said Mr Mantri.

A six-screen INOX multiplex, with a seating capacity of about 1,500 seats and the country's first premium-class lounge, is also expected to be opened soon. There will also be a 12-lane Amoeba bowling alley with a gaming centre.

The mall comes with parking space for 1,800 four-wheelers and 550 two-wheelers.

With so many mall projects in other cities either getting shelved or con-

verted into residential or commercial projects, does Bangalore have an appetite for a mall of the Mantri Square kind?

Mr Susil S. Dunganarwal, Founder, Beyond Squarefeet Advisory, says, "If there is quality retail space available, then there is demand anywhere in the country. If you make good malls, then Bangalore can take another five malls."

There should be a scientific thought involved and attention to detail as in the case of Mantri Square, he adds. "These days, developers are planning to make better malls and avoid mistakes."

He also cites the example of Express Avenue Mall in Chennai, which has also been leased out completely ahead of its opening. In fact, he says there are more malls that are likely to be opened this year with one-plus million sq.ft of space on offer.

"These malls are not to be conceived like shopping centres or shopping complexes. It is all about the product," says Mr Dunganarwal.

Despite a good location, a mall will not do well if it has not been designed well, he adds. Also, developers are beginning to realise that developing a mall is not a commercial venture, where one can "construct a mall, sell the space and walk off", he says.