

Malaysia's shopping landscape with main and new shopping precincts

From just about 100 malls in the late 1980s, the total number of malls in Malaysia had increased more than three folds to some 360 malls today, offering over 100 million square feet of net lettable retail area, with a real estate value in excess of RM100 billion. About half of the malls are located in the Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor) while the rest are scattered all over Peninsular Malaysia and the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak.

The country has eight clusters of major shopping destinations, namely (1) Klang Valley (2) Penang (3) Johor (4) Malacca (5) Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (6) Federal Territory of Labuan (7) Kuching and Miri in Sarawak, and (8) Langkawi in Kedah. Each cluster has its own shopping attractions, from a string of mid-range to exclusive and award-winning world-class outlets, to old-world stores, street markets, handicraft centres, heritage bazaars, to premium and duty-free outlets.

These varied attractions have over the years contributed towards making Malaysia one of the leading shopping destinations in Asia, thanks in part to the steadfast efforts of Tourism Malaysia, an agency under the Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Malaysia, in collaboration with the key players of the country's retail sector to promote Malaysia's shopping tourism. Streamlining Tourism Malaysia's efforts in promoting the shopping sector is the Secretariat Shopping Malaysia, which is established to market Shopping Malaysia as a recognisable brand in world-class shopping.

The country's shopping scene has also seen rapid transformation in recent years. It is no longer dominated by departmental stores of yesteryear with the emergence of integrated neighbourhood and lifestyle malls. Malaysia has kept up with the worldwide trend of meeting the increasingly sophisticated demands of modern-day shoppers. Mall facilities today are not confined to shopping activity alone but have been extended to include abundant options for dining, recreation and entertainment that enhance the overall experience for shoppers. Standard functional mall designs therefore have evolved to thematic and experiential lifestyle malls with many of them now built as part of mixed developments of residences, hotels, offices, parks and other public amenities. Malls now also lure shoppers with greater personal care as well as a huge range of merchandise from branded and non-branded Malaysian products to international brands.

Tourism Malaysia also recognises the shift in trend towards experiential shopping hence its new strategies include tactical campaigns to take the activity of shopping to the next level by highlighting shopping experiences in Malaysia. The campaigns now focus on unparalleled shopping experiences with the elements of lifestyle that incorporates the enjoyment of exciting culinary delights, entertainment, and rest and recreation for all age groups in integrated, contemporary shopping malls. In addition, places of significant interest surrounding the malls are also included in the total shopping experience packages.

The promotion of a total retail and travel experience goes in tandem with highlighting the huge range of products, including duty-free goods, as well as value buys, big bargains and attractive promotions to attract shoppers at large all year round particularly during the thrice yearly mega sales, namely 1Malaysia Grand Prix Sale in March, 1Malaysia Mega Sale Carnival from June to September and 1Malaysia Year-End Sale from November to January.

Tourism Malaysia has also earmarked specific areas with attractive shopping attributes and categorised them as Extended Shopping Zones, which have been approved in February 2015 under the Tourism

National Key Economic Areas strategic plan. The new zones, which will be promoted along with the major shopping precincts in the country, are as follows:

Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman Heritage Shopping Zone, Kuala Lumpur: Many buildings that house retail and F&B outlets along this road, popularly called Jalan TAR, have charming archways, which are an outstanding feature of pre-war shophouses built toward the end of the 19th century and early 20th century with a blend of Malay, Straits Chinese, Mughal and colonial European influences. Some of the old buildings have been renovated and painted brightly but many have retained the intricate features of the original facade. Iconic names still grace the shopping and eating scene at Jalan TAR, such as Globe Silk Store (rebranded as Globe By Sarah Hughes), G.S. Gill, Coliseum Cinema and Coliseum Café, which holds the country's record for the 'Longest Operating Western Colonial-Themed Restaurant', an award given by the Malaysia Book of Records. Together with the other premier shopping zones in Kuala Lumpur, such as Bukit Bintang, KLCC, Central Market and Petaling Street, Jalan TAR Heritage Shopping Zone offers uniquely local, vibrant and colourful shopping experiences in the capital city.

Bandar Utama, Bandar Sunway, Subang Jaya and Mutiara Damansara, Selangor: Two of the world's top ten largest malls are in Selangor – 1Utama and Sunway Pyramid. 1Utama in Bandar Utama is recognised by authoritative international media CNN as the world's fourth largest mall with more than 650 shops, Asia's largest indoor rock climbing facility, massive rooftop garden and indoor rainforest. Over in Bandar Sunway, Sunway Pyramid stands out with its distinctive Egyptian-inspired architecture. It is home to five thematic shopping precincts: Fashion Central, Oasis Boulevard, Asian Avenue, Marrakesh and Kidz Zone. The mall's huge ice skating rink and its direct accessibility to the Sunway Lagoon Theme Park add to the mall's winning factor. Mutiara Damansara has a cluster of top-notch malls, including the Curve and IPC Shopping Centre anchored by IKEA. In the last few years, newer lifestyle malls have sprung up in Selangor, including Empire Shopping Gallery (ESG) in Subang Jaya and Paradigm Mall in Kelana Jaya, all of which offer the ultimate retail therapy in Selangor.

George Town, Penang: Going shopping to the old part of George Town, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List, is like entering a time warp and a living museum. It reflects an era of a charming hybrid of the various cultures that thrive in an ambience of laissez-faire dating back centuries. Narrow alleys form a maze around a hotchpotch of 18th and 19th century clan houses and other old buildings housing antique shops, clock shops, small art galleries, budget lodgings and other businesses. In contrast, modern malls within Penang's tourist belts and high-end commercial and residential areas let shoppers experience the more contemporary facets of the tropical island. Some of the island's finest malls can be found in Gurney Drive, Tanjung Tokong near Tanjung Bungah and the fairly new Queensbay area in Bayan Lepas. Designer labels, chic cafes and an eclectic range of mid-range to high-end products can be found at many of the island's top malls, including Gurney Plaza, Gurney Paragon Mall, Straits Quay Mall, 1st Avenue and Queensbay Mall.

Malacca: The core of Malacca is another World Heritage-listed zone with a rich historical and cultural heritage of the local communities. The old façade predominantly with Peranakan, Portuguese and Dutch architecture blends in beautifully with the modern landscape. Charming Jonker Walk along Jalan Hang Jebat is the place to shop for all kinds of curios, trinkets, antiques and crafts as well as taste some of the best Malacca street food. Niche places for shopping include Tan Kim Hock Product Centre with hundreds of Malaccan bites and goodies, and Nirvana Collection for Nyonya kebaya, beaded items and batik products. There is also a fine balance with modern malls that appeal to the locals and tourists especially from neighbouring Singapore. Some of the most popular shopping spots include Dataran Pahlawan Mall with an interesting mix of chic stores and handicrafts zone, Mahkota Parade with almost 200 stores,

including F&B outlets and entertainment centres, and the newer Hatten Square Suites and Shoppes within a massive mixed development complex. The latest mall is The Shore Shopping Gallery with a charming location on the Malacca River Cruise and monorail route, and opposite the Eye of Malacca. A stylish lifestyle-tourism focused shopping mall with 100 stores, its major attractions are the world's longest aquarium – the Melaka Oceanarium, as well as The Shore Sky Tower that accords a splendid panoramic view of the waterfront and beyond.

Johor Bahru, Johor: Johor Baru, or simply JB, has a vibrant shopping scene. In recent years, several new malls have sprouted, offering international brands and duty-free shopping, while older malls have either given themselves a makeover or retained their charming original persona. The shopping vista also becomes complete with street bazaars and flea markets in and around JB. Among the top malls is Johor Baru City Square with a convenient link via covered walkway to the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) Complex, making it easily accessible and highly popular with Singaporeans as well as other tourists and locals. The CIQ is adjacent to JB Sentral, the city's transportation hub with food kiosks, cafes and convenience stores. Another bridge leads to Komtar JBCC, an upmarket mall offering big branded names, as well as one of Johor's latest attractions, Angry Birds Activity Park. The trio – JB City Square, JB Sentral and Komtar JBCC, all within walking distance – collectively make an attractive spot for great shopping, recreation and eating out in JB. Popular malls around JB include the huge and bustling KSL City Mall with about 500 shops, Danga City Mall, Holiday Plaza and Aeon Tebrau City Store and Shopping Centre. Located outside JB city centre is Mall of Medini at the doorstep of Legoland, and a little further is the Johor Premium Outlets (JPO) in Kulaijaya. It is the place to shop for top-notch designer and branded items at marked down prices ranging from 25% to 65% daily. A collection of 130 designer and brand stores, JPO is a pleasant place for shopping and dining.

Sabah and Sarawak: Shopping in the two states are concentrated in the cities – Kota Kinabalu in Sabah, and Kuching and Miri in Sarawak. Kota Kinabalu or simply KK is a dynamic city with modern malls, numerous hotels and countless eateries, including stalls at open-air markets. KK's top shopping malls include IMAGO Shopping Mall at KK Times Square, Oceanus Waterfront Mall, Suria Sabah, Warisan Square, Wisma Merdeka, Centrepoin Sabah and KK Plaza, all within walking distance in a busy thoroughfare near the waterfront area. About half-an-hour's drive away is 1Borneo Leisure & Lifestyle Mall, Sabah's largest shopping mall with varied attractions. Over in Sarawak, Kuching stands out as a fairly stylish city with several modern malls that bring together a kaleidoscope of contemporary shopping pleasures beautifully blended with local cultures, crafts and cuisines. Among its top malls is The Spring, the city's first premier mall offering many major international brands. Other top malls are CityOne Mega Mall with 600 shop lots, Boulevard Shopping Mall adjoining Imperial Hotel and Imperial Grand Suite Apartments, and about half an hour's away from the city centre is Summer Shopping Mall in Kota Samarahan with more than 300 shop lots and boasts of East Malaysia's biggest cinema – Lotus 5-star Cineplex with 12 halls. Oil town Miri has several malls including its biggest, Bintang Megamall with over 140 outlets, Boulevard Shopping Complex, The Imperial Mall adjoining Imperial Hotel complex and Miri Plaza.

As Tourism Malaysia moves into the phase of intensifying promotions of Malaysia's Extended Shopping Zones alongside the country's major shopping precincts, the retail sector players including the various retail industry associations will also raise the bar for more Malaysian malls to become internationally acclaimed, and in the process bring more accolades to the country's ever dynamic shopping sector.