

IN Malaysia, the shopping mall experience is often synonymous with luxury and comfort - pristine floors, chilly air-conditioning, spotless restrooms and a noticeable security presence. These elements are seen as essential to creating an ideal environment for shoppers. However, this concept of what constitutes an excellent mall experience is not universal.

For example, in the United States, malls typically do not employ a security team of, say, 80 guards. In Australia, malls generally do not operate from 10am to 10pm, as they often do in Malaysia. In Japan, mall parking is neither as generous nor as spacious. These differences highlight how the shopping experience is shaped by a country's infrastructure, socioeconomic values and lifestyle. While these generalisations may vary depending on the size, location and specific business models of malls, they broadly reflect how different countries shape their retail environments based on local infrastructure and cultural expectations.

So, why does Malaysia place such a strong emphasis on having numerous security guards or an abundance of cleaners? The answer lies in cultural expectations and our way of life. However, it's worth questioning whether these expectations are truly necessary - or even sustainable - in the long run.

A shift in mindset

As a society, we need to start embracing the concept of Sorry for the Conveniences. This phrase serves as a reminder that many of the comforts we enjoy in shopping malls - such as freezing air-conditioning, ultra-bright lighting and a large workforce - come at a cost. While these conveniences enhance our shopping experience, they are not always essential and their overprovision has broader implications.

For example, if we could tolerate a slightly warmer mall environment, energy consumption would decrease significantly, reducing the resources needed to maintain these large air-conditioned spaces. Similarly, if we were more mindful of restroom etiquette, we could lessen the demand for large cleaning teams. Embracing more self-service in restaurants could reduce the need for a sizable workforce, which currently includes a significant number of foreign workers.

Another simple change could be adopting dimmer lighting in non-critical areas of malls. While this may feel slightly less luxurious, it wouldn't compromise safety and would help conserve energy. Additionally, time- or sensor-operated lighting in restrooms and elevators could provide adequate illumination for short-term use, without unnecessarily lighting up spaces when not in use. It may feel a bit less comfortable at first, but it's a small price to pay for energy efficiency.

Even escalators could be improved with motion-sensor operation, activating only when someone steps on them. There might be a slight delay or a jittery start as the escalator begins to move, but this small inconvenience contributes to reducing power consumption when the escalator is not in use.



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- **This shift in mindset is not about lowering our quality of life but about recognising that many of the conveniences we have come to expect are unnecessary luxuries that carry hidden costs.**

Appreciating less for a greater cause

We need to start valuing a lower level of service in areas where it does not significantly impact the core shopping experience. By adjusting to a slightly warmer mall, getting used to self-service ordering at restaurants or tolerating minor delays from energy-efficient technologies like sensor lights and escalators, we can contribute to a more sustainable and cost-efficient retail environment. This shift in mindset is not about lowering our quality of life but about recognising that many of the conveniences we have come to expect are unnecessary luxuries that carry hidden costs.

Our reliance on security guards, cleaners and restaurant staff - many of whom are foreign workers - has far-reaching consequences. This dependence drives up operational costs for malls and businesses, which are ultimately passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices for goods and services. As we are already starting to experience, services are becoming less affordable, with the burden often shifted to foreign labour.

Furthermore, these expectations for high levels of convenience are unsustainable. The more we demand, the more resources are consumed, escalating both environmental and economic strain. This cycle must be broken if we are to build a sustainable future.

Embracing a new shopping culture

By embracing the concept of Sorry for the Conveniences, we can begin to redefine what makes a great shopping experience in Malaysia. It's about appreciating quality over excess, understanding that true comfort doesn't always require more and recognising that small compromises in convenience—such as dimmer lights, sensor-operated escalators, or timed lighting—can bring significant societal benefits.

While Malaysia's current model of shopping mall excellence emphasises comfort and luxury, it also comes with hidden costs that are becoming harder to ignore. By rethinking our expectations and making small adjust-

Rethinking the Malaysian Shopping Mall Experience



ments—whether it's tolerating a bit of warmth in a mall, practising self-service, or accepting minor inconveniences from sensor-driven technologies—we can contribute to a more sustainable and affordable shopping experience for everyone.

It's time to shift our mindset from demanding convenience at every turn to appreciating the

value of moderation. By doing so, we can foster a more sustainable, community-focused future that benefits not only ourselves but also future generations. Instead of waiting for crises, such as labour shortages or pandemics, to force change, let's take small steps now and make these improvements naturally and systematically.