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DESPITE occupying just a small portion of the tenancy mix in a typical shopping mall, the entertainment component plays a key role in pulling in the crowds.

While fashion together with food and beverage outlets usually occupy a bigger portion of a mall's net lettable area, the entertainment component tends to be the major

attraction, not only in Malaysia but also many other countries.

People are likely to travel further and stay longer in a mall with at least a unique attraction. In fact, it is pretty easy to differentiate a mall with a unique attraction from one without.

A tenancy mix is a mall's recipe to create or provide variety to meet the diverse expectations of existing and potential customers. It refers to the right selection and location of retail tenants to maximise the income of the mall owners and stimulate business in general.

This mix is broadly categorised into anchors, fashion, health and beauty, restaurants and cafes, services and entertainment.

Studies and observations have revealed time and time again that "dwell time" and footfall increase when there are unique attractions. A sizeable mall has a typical average of three hours dwell time.

A higher dwell time and footfall usually improve the likelihood of better sales by other tenants.

However, the types of attractions created by a mall are often targeted at those in the younger age group, typically youth or young working adults.

The entertainment component usually consists of a cinema chain – either Golden Screen Cinemas (GSC), TGV Cinemas or MBO Cinemas – and a family entertainment centre (FEC).

The FEC typically refers to arcades, but some malls have expanded this component to include entertainment centres targeted at children and youth.

Mainstay of shopping malls

The entertainment component is the mainstay of most shopping malls in the US. For example, in the Mall of America, Nickelodeon Universe, a 2.8ha amusement park, is located in the central portion. The mall also has an aquarium, adventure golf park and children's museum.

In Canada, the West Edmonton Mall houses a water park, the world's largest indoor theme park with Galaxyland, a tournament-ready ice rink, aquarium, adventure and mini golf park as well as a bowling centre.

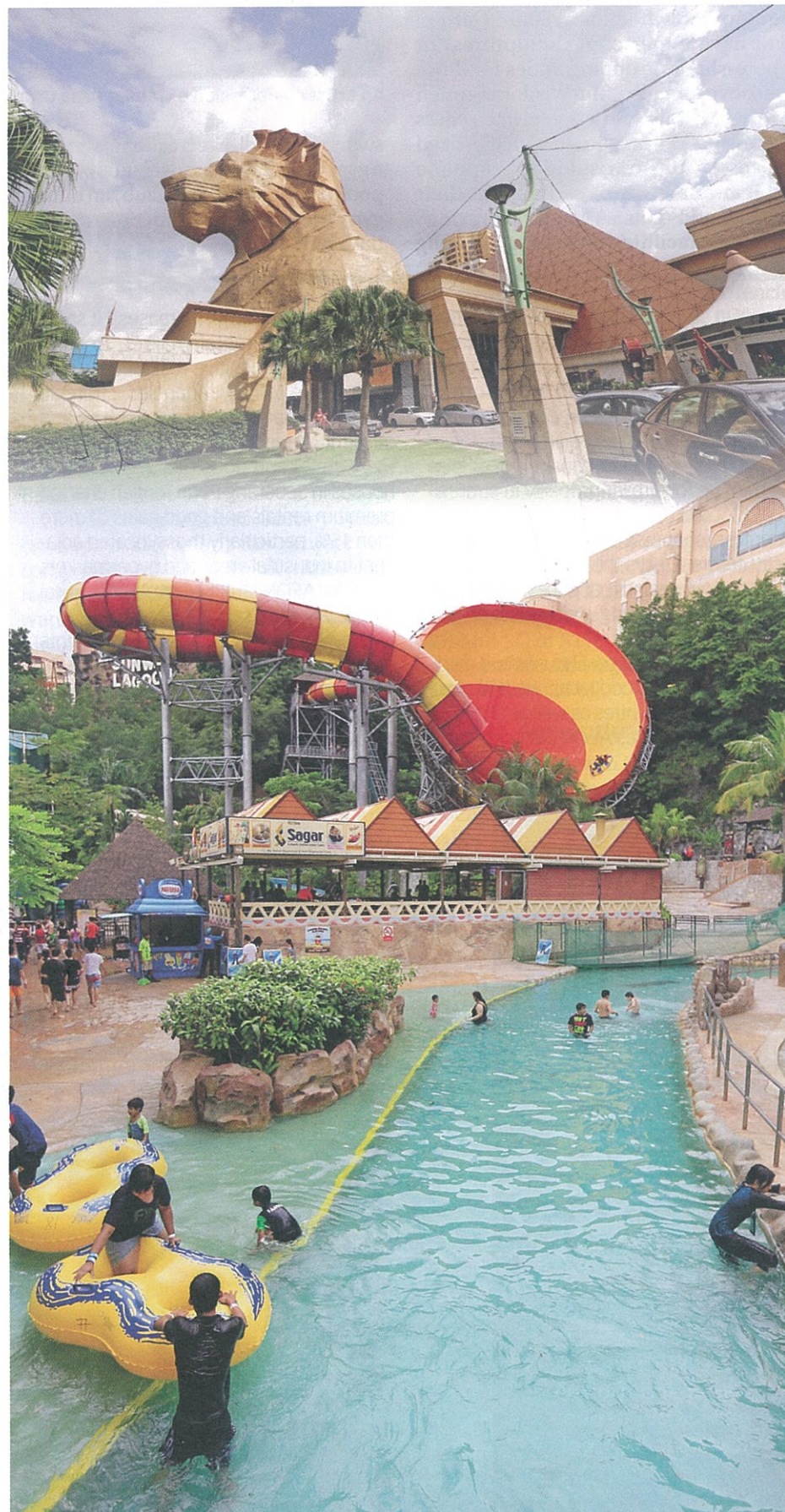
In the United Arab Emirates, the Mall of the Emirates houses Ski Dubai which is an indoor ski and snow attraction. It is the major draw not only for tourists from the Middle East, but also from around the world. Dubai Mall, for instance, has an ice rink, an aquarium, SEGA Republic which is an indoor theme park, and KidZania.

In Thailand, Siam Paragon houses a popular aquarium, and Central Plaza Bangna offers a South Korean Pororo-themed waterpark.

Over in Singapore, the Westgate Singapore has a rooftop children's playground, while Vivo City has the republic's

Entertainment key to malls' success

But more creative offerings needed to draw the crowds



Top: Sunway Pyramid, one of the earliest shopping malls, offers a good mix of entertainment. Above: For more fun, visitors can adjourn to Sunway Lagoon next door

largest rooftop park.

Back home, the shopping mall industry is also keeping with the latest attractions. Sunway Pyramid, one of the earliest malls, offers a good mix of entertainment attractions since its opening in 1997. The attractions include the SEGA City theme park – the only ice rink in Malaysia then, Pyramid Ice – the largest bowling centre – as well as the latest TGV cinemas. These three indoor entertainment attractions created a new benchmark for the local shopping mall industry.

In later years, Berjaya Times Square created the country's largest indoor theme park, and 1 Utama came in strongly with the only shopping mall bird aviary, a koi pond where the public can feed the fish, a batting cage, a rock-climbing gym, futsal courts, with two cinema chains – TGV and GSC – to woo movie buffs.

Other shopping malls were quick to recognise the importance of entertainment and started to create a tenancy mix based on entertainment as an attraction. Clusters were then created to house a

varied mix consisting of cinemas, karaokes, children's play parks, restaurants and cafes, sports and games to fulfil the public's entertainment needs.

The latest shopping mall to create a brand new attraction is IOI City Mall with its latest indoor adventure-related theme park – District 21 – where almost all the rides require physical movements. It also has Malaysia's largest ice rink.

The entertainment component in tenancy mix ultimately differentiates one mall from another. The entertainment offerings pull in the crowds as they appeal to different age groups.

Major tenants within such components are now considered basic for any mall. Everyone expects to see a children's play area, a cinema, a sports segment which includes a gym and adventure activities, as well as a cluster of well-placed restaurants and cafes for shoppers and visitors to socialise and entertain.

Unsatiated thirst for unique entertainment

However, the thirst for unique entertainment can never be satiated. Mall owners and managers must recognise that demographics are constantly evolving with new generations of children, youth and adults. Technology also plays a key role in shaping this segment.

“A shopping mall is more than just a place to shop. It is expected to provide for social and economic connections. It is not just a place for business, but also a hospitable and communal space.”

For instance, Bukit Bintang City Centre which is being developed will boast two major attractions – the Sony Zepp Live Concert Hall and the Malaysia Grand Bazaar, which will host and recreate a craft and food street to celebrate the country's diversity. It is evident that much thought has been given to planning these entertainment offerings.

The coming years will probably usher in virtual reality theme park, performing arts centre, interactive libraries and museums as part of malls' entertainment mix.

Entertainment in malls is no longer a basic component of its tenancy mix, but a key differentiating factor to improve its footfall and popularity, which will in turn boost sales of every component.

Such entertainment provides the much-needed respite from the harsh environment and rat race as well as filling in the lack of well-planned public spaces.

A well-designed and planned mall will continue to evolve to include improved entertainment offerings in a creative leasing strategy. Such investment cannot be defined within a conservative mind. What is needed is creativity.

A shopping mall is more than just a place to shop. It is expected to provide for social and economic connections. It is not just a place for business, but also a hospitable and communal space. **FocusM**

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