

## Speciality malls make a start

Retailing is seeing the beginning of super-speciality malls, as new-age retailers insist that the Indian customer is more than ready for them.

- Radhika Pancholi

What irks you the most about shopping in summers? Eight times out of 10, the answer would be: "The summer heat that leaves you sapped of all energy." It can be especially taxing when you have taken on a home-improvement project or have a wedding looming up and have to rush from one location to another to complete your shopping. But now, you could be in for a pleasant surprise as retailers and mall developers realise the potential for super-speciality malls. These are malls that specialise in just one kind of product or service range.

Pune's taken the lead here. The city now boasts of Ishanya, one of India's largest design centres and speciality malls for interiors and exteriors, spread over 10 acres. Brands such as Home Town, E Zone, Croma, @Home, Jotun, Magpie, Seating World, Spaces, Yamini, Pidilite, Fabindia, Featherlite are just some of the over 80 brands present at Ishanya. And all of them cater to home improvement requirements.

"The idea for a mall like Ishanya germinated when my wife and I when through a lot of trouble to get the right material and services when we took on our home improvement project. We thought, why not have a place where all architectural needs can be taken care of under one roof?" said Sailesh Mehta, vice-chairman and managing director, Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals Corporation and promoter of Ishanya, while inaugurating the amphitheatre and cultural club that are a part of the mall.

The response to Ishanya has been encouraging. "We have seen over 3,00,000 footfalls in the last 100 days. Nearly 35 stores will open in the next two weeks; that is nearly three lakh square feet," says I.S. Narula, president and CEO, value added retail estate and retail business, Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals.

If the hot real estate market in Pune has prompted an Ishanya in the city, the growing class of nouveau riche has prompted the UB Group to give Bangalore a luxury experience at its upcoming UB City, which will house Collection, a mall that is slated to bring a slew of luxury brands such as Emporio Armani, Gucci, Fendi, Louis Vuitton, Rolex, and Omega, to name a few.

"Apart from the shopping experience, we will also offer a different experience in food and beverages in the form of positioning, cuisine and formats which will complement the positioning of the mall," says V. Shashikanth, CEO, UB Global.

But can a couple of malls really start a trend? "If you calculate, India will see development of about 1,000 malls in the next five years," says Shashikanth, adding that "all of them cannot be in the same format or model. There will be malls catering to different segments that will be positioned differently. There will be specialised malls,

which are usually developed to dominate larger catchments, especially when differentiation becomes necessary."

Narula agrees, "The customer now seeks a distinctive shopping experience that is designed towards a particular category or class of shopping. For example, in the interior and exterior category, shopping requires both time and a particular kind of ambience and convenience, which defines customer experience."

However, Ian Watt, director, Property Zone, which is a joint venture between ICS and Old Mutual Properties points out that developers would have to take care while choosing the mix. "While super speciality malls that cater only to a certain type of clientele are becoming a reality in the Indian retail space, developers will have to carry out the dynamic exercise of building the mall and fitting the tenant mix. This would mean that many developers will first have to look at the market that they are going into and then decide between large format stores or stores that cater to the upper-end of the pyramid, and brand the mall accordingly. In many cases, retailers would end up having a mix of both."

At the end of it though, it's what the customer wants that counts. Narula concludes, "Specialty malls lend themselves conveniently to being branded if the customer experience - a very critical component of the brand positioning exercise - is precisely defined. Beyond the anchor, every touch point with the customer, in terms of the retail mix and the services and facilities, need to be designed precisely and stay consistent"