



Singapore  
**NEWS ANALYSIS; Shop till you drop strolling down Orchard**

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Will having a no-car zone reap rewards? Businesses certainly hope so

IN ONE week's time, shoppers won't have to give two hoots about honking vehicles when walking along Orchard Road - from Ion Orchard to Ngee Ann City.

That is because the area's businesses have managed to get approval to turn the famous thoroughfare into a no-car zone for five hours in the evening, on the first Saturday of every month.

The reasons for the move are simple: Competition from other malls and falling interest in one of Asia's most popular shopping belts. The stretch has been feeling the heat from other shopping haunts in Marina Bay and even suburban malls, said retail expert **Lynda Wee**.

"All the modern shopping malls are duplicated in the neighbourhoods and even other cities. Whatever you find in Orchard Road, you can find in the heartland," said Dr Wee, an adjunct associate professor at Nanyang Technological University.

Other Asian cities with famous shopping areas - Ginza and Harajuku in Tokyo, Insadong in Seoul and Tsim Sha Tsui in Hong Kong - have routinely become car-free zones on weekends. The Wangfujing shopping district in Beijing has permanently banned vehicles.

In other words, Orchard Road is simply playing catch-up.

But the question remains: Will the pedestrianisation move reap rewards?

History provides a hint, as this is not the first time that Orchard Road has tried this move. A 1989 campaign to ban cars from the area got off to a good start but fizzled out after several months because of waning interest. The street closed 40 times in three years before the practice was discontinued in 1992.

Part of the reason for the failure then was that too few events were being held. But it could also have been a case of right solution, wrong timing.

Things are different now, said Ms Melissa Ow, assistant chief executive of the Singapore Tourism Board's experience development group.

"Pedestrianisation has become something commonplace... there is greater familiarity and confidence that this is something which will take off."

This could change in the latest push; the organisers plan to make the weekend walkabout a more sustainable effort and the businesses are fully behind the move.

The Orchard Road Business Association (Orba) has rallied its 70-plus members to get behind the pedestrianisation efforts.

Revellers can expect to play street tennis, take part in mass yoga sessions and a Christmas carnival for the next three editions of Pedestrian Night. Organisers expect some 20,000 to 30,000 people to turn up.

Similarly, people themselves may be more receptive to the walk. Road closures at Haji Lane, Club Street and Circular Road have been a hit with regulars.

But the main challenge is ensuring that the novelty of Pedestrian Night, which will be on a six- month trial, does not wear off. One way the organisers are planning to do this is to make it a free and easy event, rather than one that is planned top-down, said Orba's chairman May Sng.

"If this takes off and everyone is comfortable... we do not need to have activities. We can just put out tables and chairs and everyone can just picnic there."

The plans are in place and the roads will be closed. Now it is up to shoppers to start walking.

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