



Life!

Shop and dine where you live

Gurveen Kaur

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The opening of more suburban malls gives residents the option of dining and shopping in their own neighbourhood

Last Sunday, preschool teacher Jessica Ong and her family decided to check out OneKM, a new mall in Tanjong Katong that opened last month.

"Now we have another shopping option near our home where we can have a nice dinner at one of the restaurants or do some window shopping," says the 44-year-old, who lives in Eunos with her husband and daughter.

With the recent opening of OneKM and other malls in the east, such as Bedok Mall, she notes that she "hardly ever goes to town nowadays".

She adds: "Everything can be found here. I don't have to dress up and change trains to get to Orchard."

The new shopping centre, which will open officially on Sunday, is one of four suburban malls which have sprung up within the past three months.

Like OneKM, Seletar Mall in Sengkang, hillV2 in Upper Bukit Timah and East Village in Bedok are providing more shopping and dining options to residential enclaves, saving people a trip to town.

There are more heartland malls to come. The refurbished Eastpoint in Simei is set to reopen on Tuesday and mega warehouse retail store Big Box in Jurong East is slated to open within the next two months.

Dr **Lynda Wee**, an adjunct associate professor specialising in retail management at Nanyang Technological University, says the trend of mall developers heading to the heartland is inevitable.

She says: "There is only so much land in Orchard Road. With residential areas being built up with schools, offices and hospitals, they became attractive catchment areas to build heartland malls."

She points out that suburban malls started to come into their own when brands typically found mainly in the town area ventured beyond the Orchard Road belt.

This was the case when Japanese casualwear giant Uniqlo chose to open its first Singapore store at Tampines 1 mall in 2009.

Big names such as Books Kinokuniya, H&M and Sephora also opened their first suburban outlets at Jem in Jurong East when the mall opened last year.

Dr Wee notes that towns such as Tampines and Jurong East were identified as self-contained regional centres two decades ago with homes, offices and shops where people can live, work and play,

"With a more diverse group of people in the area, malls now have to cater to their lifestyle needs. Hence bigger, more upmarket international brands have been brought in," she says.

Unlike the heartland malls of yesteryear which served mainly residents within the neighbourhood, the new kids on the retail block now appeal to a "wider catchment" and thus have to offer more in terms of commercial facilities, says Dr Chua Yang Liang, Jones Lang LaSalle's head of research for South-east Asia. "For

suburban malls to succeed these days, the positioning of the mall is very important. Developers have to understand the immediate catchment area and who the consumers are."

Last year, Jurong East became the suburbs' answer to Orchard Road when Jem and Westgate opened in June and December, giving shoppers access to international brands such as H&M and Kate Spade Saturday. The area now boasts four malls, including JCube and IMM.

Says Dr Wee: "Shoppers can now get the Orchard Road experience at their doorstep. With the population expected to rise to six million by 2020, people will want to have all their shopping needs met in their neighbourhood." This saves them from having to jostle with the growing crowds in popular shopping spots in town.

UOL Group, the developer of OneKM, sees the mall as "an important catalyst for the development of Singapore's newest commercial hub outside the Central Business District in Paya Lebar Central".

Says a UOL Group spokesman: "The mall is expected to inject vibrancy and provide convenience to office workers, residents and students in the vicinity. With the nearby Paya Lebar MRT interchange station on the East-West and Circle lines and major expressways, the mall also expects shopper traffic from other neighbourhoods."

HillV2, which opened last month, is styled as a hip dining and lifestyle destination with upmarket options such as New York cafe-cum-grocery Dean & DeLuca, Wine Connection Bistro and Black Angus Steakhouse. Of the 32 shops there, 21 are food and beverage operators.

Ms Mavis Seow, chief operating officer of retail business group of Far East Organization, hillV2's developer, says: "We believe that the immediate area around hillV2 was a little underserved in terms of food and beverage options in the past."

Seletar Mall, a joint venture between media group Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and United Engineers Developments which opens today, also aims to meet the needs of those living and working nearby. Mrs Sng Ngoi May, executive vice-president of SPH's retail property management, says: "We are happy to offer a full-fledged family-focused shopping mall for the residents and working population in the vicinity of Sengkang, Hougang, Punggol, Seletar and Ang Mo Kio."

Besides a cineplex, the mall also features enrichment and tuition centres for children as well as "dining options and lifestyle choices for families under one roof", she adds. SPH's other retail assets are Paragon and The Clementi Mall.

Tapping the growing popularity of suburban malls, some retailers are debuting fresh concepts in the heartland instead of viewing branches outside the city area as poorer cousins.

At OneKM, for instance, Chinese restaurant chain Paradise Group has opened two new dining concepts - Thai restaurant ParaThai and steamboat eatery Beauty In The Pot - along with another Paradise Dynasty outlet.

Says a Paradise Group spokesman: "Suburban malls nowadays are complete in terms of their tenant mix to give consumers convenience. This includes restaurants that offer different cuisines and ambience which complement one another."

Japanese lifestyle store Tokyu Hands also headed to the heartland when it unveiled its first store here in Westgate mall in September. It opened its second outlet in Orchard Central on Thursday last week.

Explaining the decision, Ms Yukie Sawa, senior manager of Tokyu Hands Singapore, says: "We opened a store in Jurong East first with the prospect of the area developing as a sub-centre of the city. Soon afterwards, we looked at opening a store in Orchard as it is a central shopping district."

Both areas have different types of shoppers and are "equally important", she adds. "That's why we opened the two stores just a few months apart."

Graduate student Andrew Yee is looking forward to Seletar Mall's opening today for a very simple reason: to shop for groceries. The mall counts FairPrice Finest, which will take up 23,000 sq ft at basement 2, among its anchor tenants.

"I usually take a bus ride of at least 20 minutes to Thomson Plaza to buy my groceries at the FairPrice Finest outlet," says the 26-year-old, who lives with his wife in a five-room flat in Sengkang. "The nearest FairPrice in Fernvale Point is small and does not have the items I need, such as fresh herbs and certain cuts of fresh meat such as ribeye."

Now, it will take him just three minutes to walk to Seletar Mall, which is next to Fernvale LRT station.

But with added convenience comes more congestion, which Dr Wee says is "a trade-off that comes with more commercial activities".

Mr Yee, however, has a simple solution to the inevitable downside. "If I need peace, I can always go home or cycle to the Punggol area nearby."

Indeed, some Singaporeans are flocking to heartland malls that are far beyond their backyard.

Senior human resource executive Karen Soon, 29, who lives in Hougang, was having coffee at East Village near Simpang Bedok when Life! checked out the mixed development last Sunday.

"My friends live near East Village so I decided to come over and hang out here. It's not crowded and is a change of environment for me," she says.

gurveenk@sph.com.sg

OneKM in Tanjong Katong

Positioned as a lifestyle and knowledge mall, OneKM in Tanjong Katong targets nearby office workers, residents and students.

The mall, developed by UOL Group, sits on the former site of Lion City Hotel and Hollywood Theatre. Above the mixed development is private residence Katong Regency.

The 204,000 sq ft mall has more than 150 tenants spread over three floors and a basement, including anchor tenants Cold Storage supermarket and foodcourt Food Junction. Other well-known retailers include Uniqlo, Harvey Norman and J-Mart Japanese Food Market.

With 20 schools such as Tanjong Katong Girls' School and Geylang Methodist School (Primary) within a 2km radius of the mall, it is no surprise that it houses eight set-ups geared towards kids and students. These include right-brain development centre Heguru Education Centre (right) and taekwondo training centre Taekwondonomics.

Eateries in the mall include Saigon Baguette, which offers banh mi, or Vietnamese baguette sandwiches, and Fika Swedish Cafe and Bistro. Two new dining concepts by the Paradise Group will have diners drooling too.

The Chinese restaurant chain has opened Thai restaurant ParaThai and steamboat eatery Beauty In The Pot, along with a Paradise Dynasty outlet. All three sit side by side on the second floor.

Opened: Last month and the official opening is on Sunday Where: 11 Tanjong Katong Road

Open: 10am to 9.30pm daily

Info: Go to www.onekm.com.sg

hillV2 in Hillview

Mixed development hillV2 by Far East Organization might just be the Robertson Quay in north-west Singapore. Located in the Hillview residential area in Upper Bukit Timah and connected to The Hillier condominium, the 55,500 sq ft project adds more upmarket dining and lifestyle options to the area.

Gourmands will be pleased to know that 65 per cent of the shops - or 21 of the 32 tenants - in the two-storey mall is dedicated to food and beverage offerings.

Eateries include New York cafe-cum-grocery Dean & DeLuca and American meat joint Black Angus Steakhouse, which have set up their first suburban outlets in this mall. There is also classic Italian restaurant iO Italian Osteria, which chose hillV2 to open its first Singapore branch.

Shoppers can also chill out at Cold Stone Creamery ice cream parlour and Wine Connection Bistro; be pampered at boutique spa Epi Treatz or massage outlet Traditional Javanese Massage Hut; or shop for groceries at Hillview Market Place by Cold Storage, which is the anchor tenant.

Opened: Last month Where: 4 Hillview Rise

Open: 10am to 10pm daily

Info: Go to www.hillv2.com.sg

Seletar Mall in Sengkang

Located at the junction of Sengkang West Avenue and Fernvale Road, the 188,000 sq ft Seletar Mall (right) boasts more than 130 brands over six floors.

A joint venture by Singapore Press Holdings and property firm United Engineers Developments, the family-oriented mall features Shaw Theatres, the first cinema in Sengkang.

Other key tenants in this shopping centre include department store BHG, FairPrice Finest supermarket, Foodfare foodcourt, Japanese clothing giant Uniqlo and women-only fitness centre Amore Fitness & Boutique Spa.

Eateries range from the usual suspects such as Swensen's and Subway to more offbeat diners such as Song Fa Bak Kut Teh and Oki-Machi, a Taiwanese eatery selling Japanese charcoal-grilled muah chee that is making its Singapore debut.

Parents with young children will have at least 10 enrichment and learning centres to choose from, such as Mind Stretcher Learning Centre and Vienna Music School.

Opens: Today

Where: 33 Sengkang West Avenue

Open: 10am to 10pm daily

Info: Go to www.theseletarmall.com

East Village in Simpang Bedok

The mixed development by World Class Land near popular supper haunt Simpang Bedok adds a swanky charm to the area with its modish decor.

Though more than half of the 108 commercial units in the one-storey mall have yet to be filled, East Village (right) is shaping up to be a trendy spot for cafe hounds and residents alike.

It is linked to a 90-unit condominium of the same name and several operators, such as laundry service Laundry Unlimited and dental clinic Nuffield Dental Simpang Bedok, serve the residents' needs.

But the highlights of East Village are the new food and beverage offerings. These include Sarah's The Pancake Cafe, which is quickly gaining a following with its sweet and savoury pancakes and crepes, and Salty Peanut (above), which serves handmade gelato with flavours such as salty peanut (but of course), bandung and gula melaka with salt.

Anchor tenant Cold Storage supermarket completes the package.

Opened: September

Where: 430 Upper Changi Road

Open: 9am to 10pm daily

Info: Go to www.east-village.sg

Big Box in Jurong East

Jurong East - already dubbed the Orchard Road of the west with malls Jem, Westgate and JCube joining the refurbished IMM in the past two years - will soon welcome yet another shopping destination.

Called Big Box, it will be Singapore's largest warehouse retail store with 400,000 sq ft of shop space housing a hypermarket and a mega store offering furniture, consumer electronics as well as IT and mobile accessories.

Brands include home-grown retailers Akira, ModLiving and Barang Barang, as well as international furniture labels such as Habitat from France and Hilker from Germany.

The eight-storey complex will be operated by a single retailer, home-grown consumer electronics supplier TT International.

It operates on the business concept "from factory to store front" and will pass on rental cost savings to consumers.

Shoppers will also welcome the drive-through service, where they can order goods in advance and pick up the items at their convenience.

Opening: In the next two months

Where: 1 Venture Avenue

Info: Go to www.bigbox.com.sg

Neighbourhood malls such as Seletar Mall bring dining and shopping convenience to your doorstep. -- ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

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