

Tuesday, 7 July 2020

Heading towards revival

PETALING JAYA: Stakeholders in the tourism, leisure and retail industries saw a glimmer of hope last weekend, judging by the size of the crowds at key locations throughout the country.

The masses were out and in terms of economic recovery, that is a good sign.

A quick survey of some major malls in Klang Valley saw rather healthy levels of footfall, especially at 1 Utama in Petaling Jaya, which is ranked among the world's top 20 largest malls.

Muhammad Hamzah Mohd Ibrahim, 31, and wife, Nur Balqish Roslan, 31, ventured into 1 Utama's famed Secret Garden after hearing about it for a while.

"We wanted to take some pictures and enjoy the garden. We have not been to a mall in a month, preferring to stay at home as well as to save money.

"We arrived early to enjoy the garden. We felt safe, and there was no problem at all as the place was not overly crowded," said Hamzah last Saturday.

Suria KLCC was also packed, all the way to the outdoor fountain area managed by KLCC Property Holdings Bhd, with visitors seen posing for pictures, or just enjoying themselves in the vicinity as the famed fountain and lights were turned on once again to set an atmospheric ambience.

Parminder Singh, 27, who came from Penang, said he was relieved to be able to spend some time stretching his legs outdoors after such a long period.

"I feel a bit more free now, though slightly scared as the pandemic is not over yet," he said.

"Nonetheless, I am glad for more relaxed conditions under the recovery MCO. I have not been to KLCC for so long, and this is my first visit for the year."

"The difference now is that everyone is wearing a mask, and it is less crowded, and people are more health and hygiene conscious.

"This should continue even after the pandemic so that everyone can feel safe," said Parminder.

Nathaniel Chin, 22, was also glad to be able to stroll out on a nice sunny day.

"The walk around the (KLCC) fountain area is very calming. I guess, if you follow the SOP, things will be just fine," said Chin, who agreed that more people are becoming confident of stepping out of their homes.

"In fact, from what I saw inside Suria, things seem to be just like how it was before the MCO," said the student, who lives in Kuala Lumpur's Pantai area.



Out shopping: A crowd waiting to enter one of the fashion outlets in Suria KLCC during the weekend.

Wang Pau Chin, a bank manager, was also among those seen around Suria with her husband and two children. "Seeing the good weather, I decided to bring my kids out.

"This visit to the mall (Suria) is the first we have been to for a long time," said Wang, who lives in Cheras.

Wang, who had a quick excursion through Suria, where she bought some groceries, agreed that people are increasingly confident of coming out now, and more so when the SOPs have been refined to a good degree.

In a statement, 1 Utama director, Tan Sri Teo Chiang Kok, said it was highly encouraging to see its footfall picking up to around 80% from pre-MCO levels.

July marked a new beginning as all retail outlets must open up to the previously agreed hours, which are typically 10am to 10pm for most.

During the conditional MCO, some outlets were allowed to close earlier, which did not exactly inspire consumer confidence as it was difficult to get used to shortened shopping hours.

While footfall is picking up, it does not necessarily translate into sales.

"Patronage in shops is still low due to extensive queuing (due to SOPs introduced by the government), so shoppers tend not to wait, and (some) bypass shops instead," said Teo.

To address this, he urged the government to review what it called a rather subjective policy of limiting the number of customers in the respective shops within the mall.

"It is urgent that the government announce the standard for density to be set at one person for every four square metres. "This will take away uncertainty, reduce queuing, and reduce bypassing and loss of potential sales which will determine whether retailers can recover, survive and sustain," he added.

Other than the prevalence of single-digit new Covid-19 cases over the past week, confidence in malls are also buoyed by extensive measures put in by the malls to ensure a high degree of hygiene in a pandemic environment.

“In compliance with the government’s guidelines, we have already put in place a number of safety measures in our mall to ensure that the health and safety of our customers, retailers as well as employees, ” said Andrew Brien, CEO of Suria KLCC Sdn Bhd, who remained coy about last weekend’s footfall at his mall.

“We are building our business daily, engaging with our retail partners and customers to ensure we return stronger. “Our business is predominantly built on the strength of the local customer base who are now venturing out in ever increasing numbers. At the same time, we are creating back-to-back campaigns for our customers as an appreciation for their continued support, ” he said in a statement.

“With our unique understanding of our customers developed through ongoing customer interface and research, together with our strong retailer partnerships, we believe the challenges will be met and overcome.”

(Source: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/07/07/heading-towards-revival>)