



GREEN MALLS

AN INEVITABLE EVOLUTION WAITING TO HAPPEN

Over the last few years the world seems to have turned its attention to the ever increasing carbon and green house gas emissions, water pollution, soil contamination, fluctuating temperatures, depleting biodiversity and drastic weather conditions. All structures use up natural resources in their construction and operations directly as well as indirectly. Malls are known to consume great amounts of energy and have high emission rates. Their massive building structures are always decked up with decorative lights to give off an exquisite appeal. Going green and malls have never been paired until very recently and this concept has yet to take over the Indian retail industry.

BY ASHOK JAIN

Commercial architecture has swept our nation from the moment urbanisation came into the picture. Indian cities and towns are affected economically and socially with the tremendous increase in mall and commercial building constructions, changing their landscapes and continuously growing in size. The concept of sustainability is what most corporate and multinationals are driving down through their processes and operations globally, with malls housing all the major brands that are environmentally conscious. It is thus obvious that looking into this aspect would be of great importance to mall owners. Having sustainable malls has become the need of the hour and a business strategy that will boost its image.

Retailers globally are focusing on the development of eco-friendly and sustainable malls right from their conception to keeping up with new processes, strategies and technologies to improve the sustainable development of the mall once the building has been constructed. Malls have the impression of being lavish,

opulent and beautiful and hence a great proportion of their energy consumption goes into lighting, elevators and lifts, and running air conditions to create the perfect ambience for shoppers. What mall owners need to do is first analyse the energy used by their buildings and understand in detail how they can go ahead and not compromise on the shopper's experience and comfort.

The face of malls has greatly changed over time; extended working hours and bigger areas cater to every need of the consumer. In 2012, malls in India were said to have consumed 250 kilowatts of power per sq.m in a year, with an average consumption of



Alex Konas / Shutterstock.com



KiewVictor / Shutterstock.com

RETAILERS GLOBALLY ARE FOCUSING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECO-FRIENDLY AND SUSTAINABLE MALLS RIGHT FROM THEIR CONCEPTION TO KEEPING UP WITH NEW PROCESSES, STRATEGIES AND TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MALL ONCE THE BUILDING HAS BEEN CONSTRUCTED.

120,000–600,000 litre of water a day. Over time these statistics add up and will hamper the environment and biodiversity drastically.

Traditional malls have been taken over by huge shopping complexes with modern amenities, play zones for children, large food courts and various other entertainment facilities for shoppers of all ages to socialise and have a good time. Shopping has now become an experience and not just the mere act of purchasing. For a mall to do well, it needs to possess what its competitors lack and it needs the competitive advantage to succeed financially. Some older malls are looking at getting upgrades through retrofitting while newer ones are adopting global strategies, sustainable solutions fitting in both the options.

Malls can integrate various practices to go eco-friendly and thus to do their bit in conserving the environment. Comprehensive innovative energy and water efficiency features can greatly help reduce a mall's carbon footprint. Some features even include

harnessing natural light to brighten up malls and the use of glass façade to increase visibility. Not only is it important to use updated technologies, recycling methodologies and sustainable infrastructure to consume energy efficiently but also to educate the staff at the mall about each such feature and its importance. Better aesthetics should be worked out by using local technologies and materials in the green design of the mall before construction begins.

Countries like Singapore and United Arab Emirates have spearheaded this movement and have led the way by example. Dubai's Mall of the Emirates is the first and only mall to have received the LEED gold award. The City Square Mall in Singapore is a benchmark for sustainable malls with some of the most innovative solutions and features that prove that sustainability has remarkable perks as well. Both these malls have created many opportunities and have grown exponentially – a stark contrast to the perception people have towards sustainable solutions.

The green revolution for malls will always be uphill battles that will only be overcome by the economic benefit at the end of it all. India still has significant ground to make on the sustainable mall forefront; small steps are all it takes to reach there. Changing every stakeholder's mindsets about this is the greatest challenge that mall owners face. The stakeholder needs to understand sustainability as well as profitability from green investments. Malls have the ability to go above and beyond to help be a part of the change. But the question is, are they willing to take the leap? The global push to go green is what is going to make India go forward with more retailers looking at India as a viable option to broaden their businesses.

The sustainability initiatives at malls will eventually be driven by investors, shoppers and retailers who insist on sustainability and environment-friendly infrastructure in the construction, operations and management. ●●



About the author:
Ashok Jain is Director and Strategist at Terracon Ecotech. It is India's first ecology based environment solution provider.