

# MEGA MALL EXPERIENCE – MAJOR TREND IN TOURISM AND LEISURE

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## **Abstract:**

*The development of tourism has generated a significant impact on all tourism services, such as accommodation, food and beverage etc. As an important trend, the leisure segment has become more and more attractive to the potential tourists and therefore, the large variety of leisure facilities, such as: casinos, cruise ships, marinas, malls etc. Changes occurred in commercializing the tourism products (for both the producer and the consumer) have determined the development of specialized, niche offers that rely on recreational and leisure facilities.*

*As part of leisure tourism, the shopping experience is considered to be a major trend at international level. Shopping facilities have become larger and more widespread, hence the concept of mega mall.*

*This paper underlines the importance of mega malls in terms of leisure experience, by taking into account the perspectives for tourism development, the challenges and opportunities and the tourists' behavior.*

**Keywords:** tourism, leisure, mega mall, shopping, experience

## **1. Leisure Shopping Importance**

Shopping represents a major leisure activity that has grown in its importance, in regard to other leisure activities, such as: arts and crafts, games, sports and others. The leisure activities are more or less attractive for consumers, especially taking into consideration their characteristics that consist in age, gender, residence, psychological particularities and so on.

Even though there is a large diversity of leisure activities, the shopping one has changed over the years and has shifted towards an important tourism generator. As leisure shopping used to represent an activity for tourists at the destinations, nowadays the shopping activities are the main drivers for tourism and are influencing the lengths of travel, the choice of destination, the time table of the holiday etc.

As a result of this emerging new trend, tourism destinations provide a wide variety of retail areas that are consistent with the exigence of modern tourists worldwide. *The UNWTO Global Report on Shopping Tourism*[7] presents an overview of different retail areas with appeal for shopping tourists: *informal* (ex. Roadside hut, farmhouse, street vendors etc.), *automatic retail* (ex. Vending machines, kiosks etc.), *market (fixed)*, *market*

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(*seasonal*) (ex. Christmas market etc.), *market (roaming)* (ex. Travelling market that sells products from other destination), *transport infrastructure* (ex. Shops in airports, train stations etc.), *urban centers* (village shops, shopping district etc.), *peripheral nucleus* (out-of-town entertainment and retail complex, retail park etc.).

The development and diversification of shopping facilities has been influenced by the changes in shopping behavior of consumers. It is rather hard to differentiate between the residents and tourists purchasing trends, as these facilities cater for both of these categories.

Nevertheless, the concept of mall, larger, with numerous leisure facilities, tends to focus on attracting visitors in general and tourists in particular for a genuine tourism and leisure experience.

Leisure shopping determines an understanding of consumer behavior in regard to the main reasons of this process, as shopping as enjoyment means different things for different people. Researchers have identified a list of motives for shopping as leisure, that are generating different outcomes in terms of shopping consumption: [1]

- [1] Shopping as hunting – searching and finding objects of desire;
- [2] Shopping as scouting – stimulation, reconnaissance and escape;
- [3] Shopping as socializing – interaction, amusement and shopping;

Regardless of the shopping motives, shopping as leisure has determined the retailers, the shopping facilities to adapt their offer to the necessities of consumers related to purchase, but most important related to enjoyment, amusement, socializing, escape from mandatory activities etc.

The leisure shopping can also be structured by analyzing the typology of consumers, as presented in the *Globe Shopper Index* [8]:

- **Explorer** – motivated by the stimulation and change of routine shopping provides;
- **Perfect planner** – wants to have a good time, with no surprises;
- **Brand spotter** – interested in international brands;
- **Cool hunter** – wants to keep up with the latest fashion trends and new products;
- **Deal tracker** – the rush of searching out, and finding, bargains.

Analyzing these patterns, tourist organizers and shopping representatives have struggled to provide a comprehensive offer, able to focus on the different segments of clientele.

## 2. Leisure Shopping as a Driver for Tourism Activity

The modern shopping areas, especially malls are encompassing a multitude of leisure activities as well as famous retail brands, food and beverages units, hotel units and others. Therefore, it can be seen that shopping is much more than a fun activity, it generates a niche segment for general consumers and especially for tourists.

Shopping as a motivator for travel and tourism is based on the tourists' interest in purchasing goods and enjoying a shopping experience. It is known that tourists tend to spend more on destinations than at home, due in part to the novelty of the destination products and services, but also because of it is perceived as having a good time, unrelated to work or other activity with a mandatory character.

Specialists have identified reasons for changes in purchasing behavior [3][5]:

- Purchasing at any hour, tourists are able to shop feeling unrestricted by work and can perceive the shopping experience as an escape from the routines of life;
- “Consumption of place”, shopping becomes a social and cultural interaction environment with the local community;
- Shopping for souvenirs, one of the major purchasing behaviors because it refers to the tourists and also the friends and family;

Many destinations have created an image of well-known shopping destinations that are appealing to the mass tourism. This is the case of London, Paris, Tokyo, Beijing, Milan etc. that are famous for shopping tourism with important tourist flows.

A study undertaken by the Globe Shopper Index [8], [9], refers to the best shopping environment and there are several pillars taken into consideration: shops, affordability, convenience, hotels and transport, culture and climate. An overall image of major shopping destinations (regarding all of the above) in Europe and Asia-Pacific:

**Table 1. Best shopping environment**

<b>Europe</b>	<b>Rank 0 – 100</b>	<b>Asia</b>	<b>Rank 0 – 100</b>
1.London	67.3	1. Hong Kong	68.5
2.Madrid	67.1	2.Kuala Lumpur	65.1
3.Barcelona	67.1	3.Shanghai	63.1
4.Paris	65.5	4.Beijing	60.7
5.Rome	62.9	5. Singapore	60.2
6.Berlin	62.3	6.Sydney	58.4
7.Lisbon	61.6	7.Bangkok	57.1
8.Amsterdam	61.3	8.Tokyo	56.4
9.Praga	59.7	9.Seoul	54.8
10.Budapest	59.6	10.Delhi	52.8

Source: [http://globeshopperindex.com/en/Download/european\\_paper;](http://globeshopperindex.com/en/Download/european_paper;)  
[http://globeshopperindex.com/en/Download/asian\\_paper;](http://globeshopperindex.com/en/Download/asian_paper;)

The shopping tourism is reflected in the current trends of tourism industry development. More and more tourists are interested in new forms of tourism, niche segments, taking into account the great opportunities of shopping on road venues, at destinations, at any proximity. This form of tourism has a positive impact on destinations, on tourist organizations (accommodations, F&B, leisure and entertainment, transport) and communities.

As a result of the major part played by the shopping tourism, there can be observed the drive for shopping related activities such as shopping festivals. These events attract a large number of visitors representing important travel motivators (Dubai shopping festival, Korea grand sale, USA outlet shopping festival etc.).

### **3. Mega Mall Experience and Trends**

The idea of leisure shopping is nowadays translated into a large variety of facilities, many of them associated with leisure and entertainment, food and beverage and others. Large retail shops and other venues are developed worldwide with impressive design and attractions.

Hence the concept of mega malls that are illustrated by enormous establishments that offer retail and entertainment experience. The concept of *shopper - tainment* [2] is presenting the visitors with a shopping experience, experience which includes leisure activities as: amusement parks, golf courses, waterfalls, aquariums, skating rinks, children playgrounds etc. and other themed attractions.

All of these choices of leisure time activities are directed to the residents, but most of them are especially created from the needs and want of tourists. The modern tourists, more and more exigent in decision making is given the opportunity to experience a large amount of leisure services and facilities. This is underlined by the development of 5 stars' hotels in mega malls, museums or other mega attraction designed with the main purpose to attract tourist and increase the period of time spend in the mall. The themed concept is present also in the mega mall concept, whether is a restaurant or a theme park, water park or other significant attraction.

The mega mall recreates the image of an entire destination, underneath its roof, with a glamorous design, where there can be found all of the visitors' requirements in terms of offers. Besides this it provides the social and cultural environment to get in touch with the travel experience of the destinations. More and more attention is given to the tourism experience in the mall, rather than only the retail activities. Future trends are presenting the mega malls as environment for tourism and leisure, with no dependence of the natural environment, therefore suitable for all year attendance.

The entertainment part of the mall complex will be developed and diversified in order to provide unique attractions and create a special product with large addressability and international notoriety.

There are a lot of features that are generating an important appeal for visitors, a special one is considered to be the size, but this is also one of the main challenges of the mega malls, for instance there are malls operating at a small capacity, known as ghost malls, or dead malls.

**Table no.2. Largest malls worldwide**

<b>Shopping Mall</b>	<b>Gross leasable area</b>
1. New South China Mall, China	6.46 million sq ft (600,153.7 m <sup>2</sup> )
2. Golden Resources Mall, China	6.0 million sq ft (557,418.24 m <sup>2</sup> )
3. Central World, Thailand	4.62 million sq ft (429,212.04 m <sup>2</sup> )
4. SM Mall of Asia, Philippines	4.2 million sq ft (390,192.76 m <sup>2</sup> )
5. Dubai Mall, UAE	3.77 million sq ft (350,244.46 m <sup>2</sup> )
6. West Edmonton Mall, Canada	3.77 million sq ft (350,244.46 m <sup>2</sup> )
7. SM Megamall, Philippines	3.6 million sq ft (334,450.94 m <sup>2</sup> )
8. Istanbul Cevahir, Turkey	3.47 million sq ft (322,373.54 m <sup>2</sup> )
9. Berjaya Times Square, Malaysia	3.44 million sq ft (319,586.45 m <sup>2</sup> )
10. Siam Paragon, Thailand	3.22 million sq ft (299,147.78 m <sup>2</sup> )

Source: <http://www.touropia.com/largest-malls-in-the-world/>;

Studies undertaken are presenting attributes that are a major influence on consumers' behavior related to the shopping mall experience [6]: ambiance, costumer care services and facilities, shop diversity and type, accessibility, theme and appearance, color elements inside the mall, various promotional activities, sound and music. All of

these have different degrees of attractiveness for the different types of tourist, and hence, knowing this will offer the opportunity to better respond to the necessities of potential and actual visitors.

An important issue for the future of shopping mall development is the online shopping activity that is definitely increasing in popularity, most of all, determined by the development of technologies, in particular the information ones that allows consumers to browse through offers, to compare prices and other attributes and purchase all kind of products and services.

A study conducted by Pricewaterhouse Cooper [10] related to retail consumers shows that the number of people purchasing online has increased over the years, at a global level: 2012 – 2,9%; 2013 – 5,5%; 2014 – 6,0%; 2015 – 7,1%.

Mega malls owners and representatives are, on one hand encouraging the use of digital technology related to shopping and on the other hand it intensifies the initiatives in developing other leisure and entertainment facilities that will add value to the retail segment and overall image.

Even though there are a multitude of benefits for the destination and tourism representatives, the negative impact is becoming an important issue for small producers and business, especially since the number of mega malls is increasing in the urban areas.

More than that, an important concern is represented by the pressure of international brands on local identity and products [4].

Tourist destinations are focusing on promoting the particularities of local products and services as well as the concept of shopping destination, while the importance of mega malls is not to be discarded.

A successful image of shopping malls is a reflection on tourist destination notoriety and competitiveness. Initiatives for developing such establishments are taken into consideration challenges like: traffic congestion, crowded spaces, increase consumerism, excess shopping tourism on the expense of other tourism forms, sustainability issues and others.

Nevertheless, the development of shopping malls is found on an upward trajectory due to the increasing number of visitors and tourists, that are repositioning the image of destinations in terms of travel and tourism.

### **3. Conclusions**

Major changes in the tourism landscapes in accordance with the modern tourism behavior have led to new forms of tourism, that are repositioning the role of tourists from the passive to an active one in constant search for leisure experience. As a result, leisure shopping provides a new such experiences, especially the mega mall establishments with more and more facilities offered.

Future perspectives show an increase in the mega mall importance with accent on the leisure features in terms of facilities but also events. This being the case, important destination initiatives have been taken to a sustainable development of mega malls that are presenting themselves as major tourist attractions.

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