

168 MALL: Bargain paradise, shopping shangrila

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AMID these weary times when shopping has become an elusive luxury, a unique palace glints to shoppers with tight budgets in the heart of Divisoria—168 Mall.

Strategically centered in what has long been considered as Bargainville, 168 Mall offers a one-of-kind shopping experience to bargain hunters or mall rats in search of excitement and novelty.

“We wanted to change Divisoria’s image. Although it is popular for being a shoppers’ mecca, it has turned off many picky customers who perceive it as a dirty district. 168 mall offers something different. It offers a complete mall with special bonuses — cleanliness, convenience and the sophisticated ambiance of commercial centers like Makati and Greenhills. We cater to all kinds of customers, from the high-end to the street vendors,” says Delfin So, 168 Mall’s soft-spoken and amiable administrator.

Majestically sprawled on a floor area of some 25,000 sq. meters, 168 Mall offers shoppers a fun respite from the hassles of daily living. It gives visitors a surreal sense of the best of what material things could offer without scratching their wallets.

For samplers: 1,000 stalls, three buildings and floors of wall-to-wall goods and food items, a luxurious parking space and hundreds of security guards on various shifts ensuring a crime-free and zero-stress walk past all the stores.

168 Mall’s more popular patrons read like a roster of VIPs for a P25,000 per table opera. Topping its royal list of customers is former First Lady Imelda Marcos. When not jet-setting to New York to buy designer clothes, shoes and gems, Mrs. Marcos could be seen contentedly stepping into the crowd of Divisoria’s treasure trove of consumer products. Congressmen also take time out from their rigid schedules to check out 168 Mall. So do showbiz personalities, idols and trendsetters.

“The reason why we cater to the A to E crowds, even Forbes Park residents, is that our goods are updated. There is turnover every two weeks. The products are of good quality and are very cheap as most are ordered directly from the factories, doing away with middlemen or agents,” reveals So.

168 is composed of Malls 1, 2 and 3 which are actually connected. With escalators for shoppers and elevators for merchants, Mall 1 has three floors with about 40 stalls on the first two. Sections are called “pasilyo” with visible signs suspended from the ceiling so no one would have to worry about getting lost. But the prospect of getting lost is not a scary one, not when there are more than a thousand stalls that carry RTW, footwear, fashion accessories, novelty items, hardware, home furnishings and appliances, toys, and many other commodities perfect as gifts.

At the top of Mall 1 is a food court offering varied menus from more than 20 food establishments.

“The brains behind 168 Mall is a group of Filipino-Chinese businessmen. We started operating in 2003. We became fully operational in November of the same year. In March 2004, we started operating Phase 1 to Phase 3. We plan on expanding next year. We plan to put up a boutique section to cater to the high-end market. It is expected to be fully operational by October 2007,” says So.

The phenomenal triumph over fickle consumers of 168 Mall is anchored on the three magical numbers which is part of its name. Roughly translated, 168 means “road to success” for the Chinese.

Word of mouth regarding 168 Mall’s endless array of quality yet cheaper-than-the-rest goodies has added to the shopping mecca’s unique image as the ultimate answer to budget buying in these pinching economic times. Adding glitter to its reputation are numerous awards it received in 2005.

168 Mall was cited, unsurprisingly, as the No. 1 Wholesale Shopping mall in Metro Manila and received the 2005 National Shoppers’ Choice Annual Award. The honor was bestowed by the Sales and Marketing Professionals Association of the Philippines, Nation Shoppers’ Choice Annual Awards, the Shoppers’ Choice Magazine and the Asia Pacific Market Research Council.

Although more and more shoppers are trooping to 168 Mall, especially this holiday season, So believes that Divisoria’s bargain paradise still does not threaten other commercial centers in the metropolis.

“We are only competing with ourselves. Other malls have their loyal customers. However, 168 Mall has been attracting patrons from Greenhills and Makati as it offers the same convenience, security plus a lot more goodies,”

says So.

So believes that 168 mall does not have to come up with a slogan to attract more buyers. Testimonials of more than satisfied customers say it all.

“If it can’t be found at 168 Mall, it can’t be found!,” is the common conception of most shoppers, especially the seasoned hagglers. So, however, dispels this and says there are still items prohibited at the mall. These include fire hazards like firecrackers and butane.

“We don’t have a slogan for 168 Mall. If ever, all I could think of is this message for the shoppers. ‘Come to 168 Mall and see the difference,’” says So with a smile.