

Compass One opens - with strong focus on young families

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Above: A lion dance performance helped to mark the official opening of Compass One, previously called Compass Point, yesterday. ST PHOTOS: DON CHI

Even as Singapore's retail industry is mired in a prolonged slump, some malls are betting on playgrounds, nursing rooms and eateries with high chairs to draw the crowds.

Sengkang's Compass One mall, which officially opened yesterday after a year-long upgrade, is the latest to jump onto the family-friendly bandwagon.

The mall - previously called Compass Point - has 50 new retailers and many aspects of the refurbished shopping venue are geared towards younger families - a strategy that experts say should work despite a sustained retail slowdown.

It includes a new rooftop play area, which may make not just parents and their little ones happy, but the mall owners and retailers too.

Ms Sarah Lim, a senior retail lecturer at Singapore Polytechnic, said that paying attention to young families is a smart move, especially in areas like Sengkang and Punggol.

When there is a playground that children want to visit, there is an added incentive for parents to go to the destination.

Both are new towns, with about 350,000 Singapore residents in total. A high proportion are young families. Among all the towns in Singapore, Punggol has the highest proportion of children - at 11 per cent this year, according to official data released yesterday.

Said Ms Lim: "When there is a playground that children want to visit, there is an added incentive for parents to go to the destination. The families may also spend on grocery shopping and food and beverages."

Marketing academic Prem Shamdasani from the National University of Singapore's business school said that the young family segment may be "fairly resilient (to the slowing economy) given their higher aspirational levels and desire to consume a variety of products and services".

The opening of Compass One comes eight months after the launch of Waterway Point in Punggol. Just last weekend, it opened its rooftop playground, which is in addition to an indoor play area for children.

Since its opening, Waterway Point has received 21 million visitors - or an average of 2.6 million a month - a number that may be reached by other malls in a year.

"As it is situated in a new town, a large segment of the mall's visitors is made up of young families who have set up their new homes in the area," said a spokesman for Frasers Centrepoint Malls, which manages Waterway Point.

Compass One has already "definitely" seen more footfall than its previous incarnation in the past month since its soft opening, said Ms Ng Chiang Ling, chief executive of its owner M&G Real Estate Asia, acknowledging that some of it could be due to the novelty factor.

But she is positive that the focus on young families will pay off. "Kids are really the ones who encourage parents to spend," Ms Ng told The Straits Times.

Since young families are more likely to eat out more often, the proportion of eateries has been ramped up to 33 per cent, up from 20 per cent.

There is also a 130 sq m space - accommodating up to five parent-child pairs - which comes with diaper-changing stations, a hot and cold water dispenser, sofas and two nursing rooms.

In October last year, a contest was held to name the refurbished mall. The name Sengkang Mall was picked, but after criticism from members of the public, it was changed to 1 Sengkang Mall, and later changed again to Compass One.

Mr Koh Hai Eng, 57, a retiree who was with his six-month-old grandson at the mall yesterday, is glad it is now more child-friendly.

"It's cleaner now, and there are more shops where we can buy things for him," he said.