



pg15 Roshan Abbas tells us more about an upcoming spoken word festival

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pg16 The Orange Festival of Music and Adventure takes place in Arunachal Pradesh



The Afternoon Despatch & Courier

MUMBAI | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2018



Pic courtesy: Palladium



Pic courtesy: Oberoi Mall



Pic courtesy: Inorbit Mall

The last quarter of the year is always busy for Mumbai's retail temples—the malls that have sprung up all over, changing the way we shop, eat, spend days out with our families and much more. Barely have the Dassera and Diwali festivities ended and it's time for Santa and his elves to make their presence felt; the décor changes swiftly from traditional lamps to sleighs and 'snow', as malls outdo each other to bring in footfalls. Whether all this translates into increased sales is another story, but certainly there is barely any room to move as Christmas frenzy kicks in and everyone's out to get a selfie with Santa.

The care that goes into the Christmas/ New Year ambience is staggering. Oberoi Mall, for instance, has created what it refers to as "the city's tallest Crystal Christmas Tree having over 10,000 delicate crystals intricately woven together". Designed by the award-winning experiential design agency EGI, this Crystal Tree also spins, creating a shimmering visual spectacle. A spokesperson says that it took over 240 hours for construction; "six designers including 3-D animators, sculptors and material specialists and over 30 artisans worked tirelessly to give it its unique rotation!" Oberoi rang in the Christmas festivities as early as November, hosting a cake-mixing ceremony where 100 participants mixed over 100 kgs of ingredients in 100 minutes.

Palladium, the luxury destination, took their X'mas décor to a whole new level, with Soha Ali Khan unveiling an installation inspired by Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*; curated by High Street Phoenix, it was produced by Surreal Design Studio. It was a star-studded evening, complete with a laser light and sound show and a ballet performance by Ava Bharucha, with the city's swish set in attendance and a live performance of the Grand Piano at the Festival Square.

# Santa's at the store

The malls are all dressed up for X'mas and New Year festivities, with breath-taking decor and fun-filled activities, says **Menka Shivdasani**



Pic courtesy: Viviana Mall

Rajendra Kalkar (President West – The Phoenix Mills Ltd), Rashmi Sen (COO – The Phoenix Mills Ltd) were also present on the occasion. The installation shows ballet dancers inside a beautifully lit and colourful gazebo. The structure was created over one month and took 50 people, using 300 acrylic sheets and almost one lakh lights, each crafted to size and attached. The installation has been up all this month, with a slew of activities to accompany it.

At Inorbit, the focus is on fun. Naviin Ibhrampurkar, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications, Inorbit Malls, explains that once the marketing team has brainstormed and come up with a concept, then décor

elements and activities that are in sync with the central idea are formulated. "Last year, Christmas revolved around the central theme of 'Gifting Christmas'," he adds. "We chose this concept as Christmas is all about gifting and surprises. Based on this idea we had a Giant Sized Stocking in the main atrium, where kids could go inside the stocking and play games to win surprise gifts. The kids could also visit the chocolate fountain and make their own chocolates of different shapes and flavours."

The move was so successful that they have used it again this year, only this time, there is a larger than life, 22-foot tall Gifting Santa in the main atrium of the mall, which offers a great photo

op. Inorbit has also created other photo ops such as a rotating Polar Bear and the Christmas Bauble, plus a special zone with artificial snow where people of all age groups can enter and experience the magic of Christmas. The main driveways also have large, lit-up Christmas trees.

The quick-change challenge from Dassera and Diwali to Christmas isn't easy. At Inorbit Malls, which has five outlets, the planning happens six months in advance. A spokesperson says: "In our annual cycle, October to December are the high activity months. The whole quarter has back-to-back festivals and is the busiest for the mall. The entire quarter has a festive feel with enticing décor, best products and attractive offers that are lined up to deliver a superior shopping experience."

Mall authorities have to keep in mind the fact that Diwali calls for traditional décor in warmer and vibrant colours, while Christmas involves hues of red, white and green. Shopping behaviour also changes; Diwali means shopping across categories like jewellery, watches and ethnic apparels, while during Christmas, F&B and entertainment go hand in hand with shopping.

"Malls today are perceived as social venues and not just shopping destinations," says Ibhrampurkar. "It is the experience that draws consumers to the malls and at Inorbit we work towards creating shareable experiences. Experiential marketing is

a strong factor that entices consumers." During this festive season, their footfalls rise by 8 to 10%, and by the time the Christmas vacations and wedding season begin, the malls are busy on weekdays too.

All this is a far cry from 25 years ago, when kids thought that the most exciting thing they could do was visit Akbarallys, the first department store in the city, where you stood in line to meet Santa and were thrilled to receive two toffees and touch his beard. It was a simple pleasure and brought tremendous joy.

Today, with increased competition and tougher marketing challenges, the levels of glitz and glamour—not to mention budgets—have all gone up exponentially. The mall administrations we asked were all unwilling to put figures on how much they spend, though the people at Palladium did acknowledge that an installation of the kind they have is "heavy on the cost but definitely worth the return".

While each of these initiatives is special in its own way, there is one mall in the city, particularly, which has the spirit of the season right. Viviana Mall, which keeps the action going throughout the year, with unique events, such as the recent 'The Pawsome Show' for pets, has all the usual trappings of Christmas—a 30-foot tree, Santa Parades, elves, jugglers, stilt walkers and music performances, all of which contribute to a 10-15% jump in footfalls. "Having customer engagement initiatives is imperative," says Rima Pradhan, Sr VP-Marketing, Viviana Mall, who adds that such initiatives should not be over the top or intrusive.

Through all this, however, they also have the #SantasGiftFactory campaign, where they organised a surprise party and brought Santa's cheer to more than 200 kids of a municipal school run by the Thane Mahanagar Palika Shikshan Vibhag. For these children, it must have been a truly merry Christmas!