

Shopping malls could take up to a year to return to normalcy

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Shopping malls, an intrinsic part of urban India, may take up to a year to return to normalcy and, when they do, they are likely to operate in a different avatar, said malls owners and retailers.

Shopping malls may be the last in line when businesses gradually reopen in a post-covid-19 world, with discretionary spends likely to stay muted and social distancing becoming the new normal.

A webinar, "Malls in a post covid-19 scenario", hosted by the Retailers Association of India on Tuesday, focused on how the entire retail ecosystem, including multiplexes

and restaurants, will need to undergo a complete change to bring back consumers once the crisis is over.

Movie theatres, malls and restaurants will be the last to open, though they closed before anyone else did, said Alok Tandon, chief executive of Inox Leisure Ltd.

"All operators will have to reduce the menu and ensure food that is served is safe. Movie intervals need to be staggered and also planned so that no two intervals are the same, so people don't crowd in the lobby. Our main job would be to regain the confidence of customers," Tandon said.

Shopping malls in India are not confined to retail, they have become a larger social experience, where food and entertainment play a major part. The revival period for malls would be 6-12 months, as

consumers will take limited risks and confidence will return slowly as cases reduce, said Ashwin Puri, director of investment and development firm Lake Shore India Advisory. "Food and

beverage, and cinema will be the slowest to resume. Among food, cinema and entertainment, cinema (multiplexes) will be the last to resume."

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