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Cuba's Manzana de Gmez mall opens in bid for tourist spend

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Manzana de Gomez in Havana, Cuba

By STAFF REPORTS

The business division of Cuba's military has opened the first luxury mall in Havana since the revolution in 1959.

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The Manzana de Gmez mall opened a few weeks ago and has made headlines, not so much for the mall itself, but due to the fact that the goods on sale, in some cases, are priced higher than a lifetime salary for many older Cubans. With the arrival of cruise ships and high-end hospitality, Cuba has seen a surge of tourism and consumer interest recently, and the establishment of the mall is geared toward this group rather than the local population.

Consumerism in Cuba

Military-operated business development has grown immensely under General Raul Castro, who became president when Fidel Castro retired in 2008.

Cuba's military business dealings have a hand in retail, imports and hospitality. The military's businesses in these sectors are Cuba's largest.

For example, Gaviota, the military-operated Cuban tourism board, is currently in a hotel building spree now that the embargo has been lifted and cruise ships from U.S. ports have returned to the island nation.

Also, TRD, the military's retail arm, has shops numbered in the hundreds across Cuba. TRD shops sell necessities such as soap to leisure items, with prices often much higher than what goods would be in other countries in the region.

The Cuban military is also behind the newly opened Manzana de Gmez mall in Havana. The mall is located on a tree-lined boulevard in Havana's old, colonial district.



The top floors of the Manzana de Gmez building will house a Kempinski-branded hotel

Manzana de Gmez includes the first Cuban shops of brands such as L'Occitane en Provence, Montblanc, Lacoste and others. Mall visitors can purchase Canon cameras and Bulgari watches as well.

Many passersby have said that the mall is nice and welcome the addition and have enjoyed window shopping, but

the goods are too expensive for local Cubans to purchase.

An [Associated Press](#) anecdote of the Manzana de Gmez mall opening summarizes the disparity of the situation, explaining that the sales associate working in L'Occitane en Provence makes \$12.50 a month, but a product she sells, such as face cream, retails for \$162.40 an ounce.

The mall was developed as a tourist draw, but many travelers have planned trips to Cuba to escape consumerism of the West while on holiday.

Above the mall, Swiss hospitality brand Kempinski Hotels will be one of the first luxury chains to establish a presence in Cuba, opening its first location in Old Havana this coming June.

The Gran Hotel Kempinski Manzana La Habana will have 246 rooms in the Manzana de Gmez, a five-story historic building in Old Havana. Kempinski has a contract with Cuba's Grupo de Turismo Gaviota, the island nation's tourism board ([see story](#)).

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