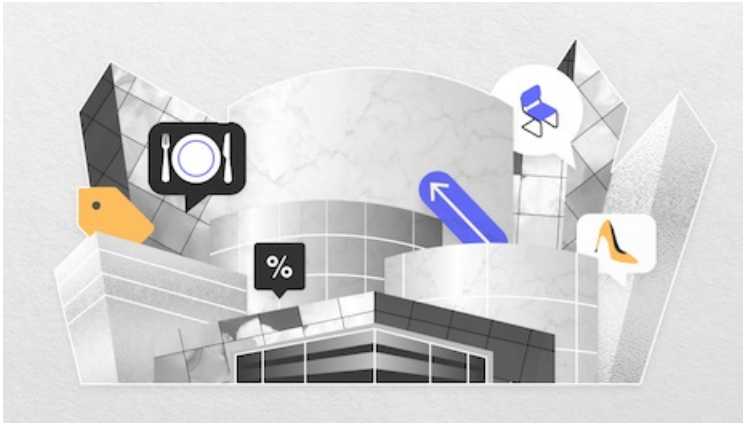


RETAIL

In-store experience drawing consumers back to malls: Placer.ai

April 3, 2024



Despite downfalls due to COVID-19 lockdowns and online shopping, retail activity at malls and shopping centers is resilient. Image credit: Placer.ai

By ZACH JAMES

Visits to shopping centers and malls in the United States are returning to pre-pandemic levels, according to findings from global retail foot traffic analytics platform Placer.ai.

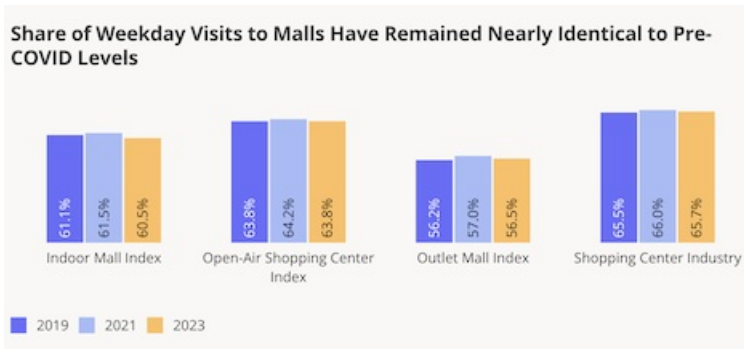
The company's latest report details the resurgence of major domestic retail centers, as visitorship and shopping behavior returns to a state of normalcy unseen since 2019. As in the luxury space, experience is proving key to this rebound in relevance, with various types of entertainment taking the place of large anchor stores as mainstream draws.

Titled "The Comeback of the Mall in 2024," the white paper draws upon Placer.ai's collection of 3,000 tracked shopping centers in the U.S. as well as its Mall Indexes for data. The publication then analyzed consumer behavior both what has shifted and what has remained the same to determine how malls can attract more shoppers.

Comeback time

Despite downfalls due to COVID-19 lockdowns and online shopping, retail activity at malls and shopping centers is remaining resilient.

Compared to 2019, traffic at shopping centers is just 2.3 percent lower than in 2019, and 1 percent for the open-air variety. Meanwhile, indoor malls are still struggling a bit, down just under 6 percent compared to 2019.



While 2021 saw higher foot traffic at malls during the week, 2023's performance was about on-par with 2019's figures overall. Image credit: Placer.ai

For comparison, in 2021 those gaps ranged between 10.7 percent and 15.3 percent, and closed narrowly in 2022 thanks to

pandemic restrictions lifting ([see story](#)).

Last year's resurgence is attributed to lessening inflation stateside, leading to a willingness for consumers to go back to familiar retail stomping grounds. Malls are the sites of many recent luxury openings, with the properties accounting for nearly 40 percent of all storefront debuts in 2022 ([see story](#)).

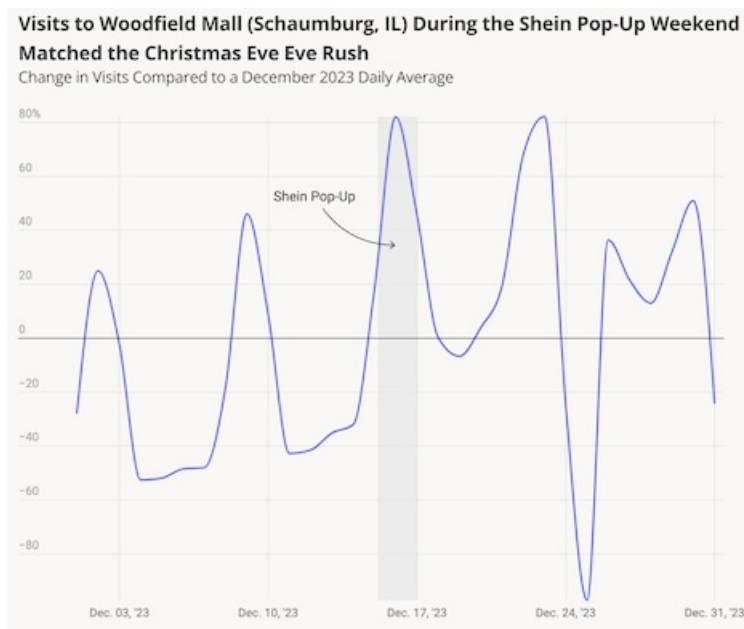
High-end boutiques could end-up buoying these spaces, as the sector is expected to maintain its upward trajectory for the foreseeable future despite looming and ongoing economic uncertainty ([see story](#)).

Placer.ai's findings spotlight that in Sunbelt states Louisiana, Texas, Georgia, Arizona, California and Florida upscale shopping centers outperformed normal malls in the number of visitors by up to 30 percent in 2023.

Exclusive experiences

Much like in the world of luxury, malls and shopping centers are leaning on experiential features to draw in, and maintain, their respective customer bases.

Openings of new restaurants, family entertainment venues, big box stores and small-scale pop-ups saw monthly visitorship jump by as much as 80 percent, bringing foot traffic in line with the hectic year-end holiday period. This showcases a real-world example of what consumers have been saying in surveys for months ([see story](#)) and even years ([see story](#)).



Providing clientele with distinct reasons to make the trip to a store or shopping center outside of products is proving key to attracting attention. Image credit: Placer.ai

Bringing more customers in also creates opportunities to build loyalty ([see story](#)), which is another leading contributor to retail revenue growth.