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IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Popular fashion brands set up outlet stores at IMM

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(On her) White ruffled polo tee, \$35 (usual price \$100) and khaki shorts \$47.25 (usual price \$135); (On him) Blue striped shirt, \$54.25 (usual price \$155) and bermuda shorts, \$57.75 (usual price \$165), all from Sacoor Brothers Outlet, 01-15 IMM. -- PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



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By Leslie Kay Lim

A slew of popular brands is making its way into the outlet scene in Singapore. Agnes b., Banana Republic, Coach, Marella and Sacoor Brothers are among new labels that have set up shop in IMM in the last few months, either with stand-alone stores or as part of multi-label outlets.

This is the first time these brands, most of which occupy the segment between high street and high fashion, are selling their merchandise in Singapore via factory outlet stores.

The influx is part of IMM's strategy to rebrand itself as Singapore's biggest outlet mall. It is at the tail end of a year-long, \$30 million revamp that began in May last year.

It currently houses 39 outlet stores and will have 50 in May, when the renovation is scheduled to be completed.

Mr Chew Hock Chye, IMM's general manager, says: "Outlet stores combine the two loves of Singaporeans - shopping and good



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value. They offer people the convenience of outlet shopping without them having to leave the country."

He declines to give figures but says the stores have helped to draw traffic. IMM's unique positioning as an outlet mall, he adds, complements the nearby JCube and upcoming Westgate mall - all three are operated by CapitaMalls Asia.

Before IMM, Anchorpoint and Changi City Point, both operated by Frasers Centrepoint Malls, were the main players in the outlet scene here, with eight and 14 outlet stores

respectively.

However, they feature mostly mass retailers, such as Charles & Keith, Cotton On, Fox and Giordano, whose products already start at low prices. Frasers Centrepoint Malls declines to give details on its brand selection and how these stores have fared.

IMM, in comparison, offers more covetable brands such as Agnes b., Coach, DSquared2 and Max Mara.

The other nearest outlet mall offering similar labels is in Malaysia - the Johor Premium Outlets, which opened in December 2011.

Brands at IMM say they were offered the right opportunity at the right time to open their first outlet shops in Singapore.

French label Agnes b. opened its first outlet branch here two weeks ago. The 2,000 sq ft shop offers merchandise from two seasons ago, as well as clothing and accessories exclusive to its outlet stores. Discounts range from 30 to 70 per cent off retail prices.

Mr Felix Siow, brand manager of Agnes b. Singapore, says the label already had plans to open an outlet store here last year. "We felt that there was potential, judging from the good response to our bazaar sales."

IMM, he says, offers the ideal space, location and crowd.

He does not want to give figures but says sales in the past two weeks have been within expectations, with bags from the Voyage line and small leather goods being the bestsellers.

The factory outlet business, however, is a sensitive topic for some labels.

Coach, the popular American bag brand, opened a pop-up factory outlet store in IMM last October but declines to comment for this story. Bags and other leather goods for men and women that used to retail at about \$200 to \$1,000 are now going for 20 to 50 per cent off. The shop has a year-long lease on the space.

While regular leases at IMM run for three years, both Coach and IMM have declined to comment on their lease agreement. But Urban understands that the Coach store has reserved the space for one year.

The Kwang Sia group, which distributes Marella, Max & Co, Max Mara and DSquared2 in Singapore, opened a store in the mall in January.

Under the store name The Sale Shop, the group sells merchandise from up to three years ago at prices 60 to 80 per cent less.

Kwang Sia signed up for only two months when the space became available for a short time, so its store will close at the end of this month.

Another outlet store is slated to occupy the space when Kwang Sia leaves, but IMM cannot name the retailer as the deal has not been inked.

American brands Gap, Banana Republic and Guess are selling past-season stocks at up to 70 per cent off at the FJB Outlet, which opened in January. The FJ Benjamin Group distributes the labels here.

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Mr Richard Gan, marketing executive of Gap and Banana Republic, says: "We have used other avenues, such as off-site sales, to clear inventory. While these have been effective, we wanted to offer our customers a better and more conventional format."

More brands, including British label French Connection and French fashion brands Naf Naf and Tila March, will come on board within the next two months.

The brands will be available at a multi-label outlet shop called La Boutique, which will be operated by local distributor Kai Yan.

Retail experts say the demand for outlet stores here will grow as more Singaporeans travel and become used to scooping up bargains at factory outlets overseas.

However, the lack of space in crowded Singapore may prove to be a problem, says Dr Lynda Wee, an adjunct associate professor in retailing at Nanyang Technological University's Nanyang Business School.

"Outlet malls require large spaces and relatively cheaper rentals. They operate on low margins and get together with other brands to offer families the option of a shopping destination," she says.

The alternative, therefore, is to find more remote locations for these malls. "They are excellent for drawing shoppers, thereby generating crowds for developing a township," she adds.

But Ms Sarah Lim, a senior retail lecturer at Singapore Polytechnic, cautions that outlet malls have to be mindful of their overall presentation and offerings.

"Otherwise, they may just be perceived as a dumping ground for products. This will tarnish the image and goodwill of the retailers as well as the mall."

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Photographer DIOS VINCOY JR for The Straits Times; **Stylist** JEROME AWASTHI; **Assistant stylist** JULIUS KENSAN; **Hair & make-up** JOHN LEE, using YSL Beaute; **Models** DARIA & DENNIS, both from Upfront

ANCHORPOINT MALL

370 Alexandra Road; www.fraserscentrepointmalls.com/malls/ap/
(<http://www.fraserscentrepointmalls.com/malls/ap/>)

Opened in 1997, Anchorpoint was the first mall here to offer a cluster of outlet stores after its revamp in 2008 by Frasers Centrepoint Malls.

Anchor tenants include Cold Storage and various dining establishments.

There are eight outlet stores in Anchorpoint: Billabong, Capital Optical, Charles & Keith, Cotton On, Fox, G2000, Giordano and Pedro.

Discounts go up to 70 per cent, but most of the offers range from 30 to 50 per cent.

Merchandise includes apparel and accessories up to two seasons old, as well as items made exclusively for outlet stores.

Pros: The location is fairly central. An overhead bridge linking it to Swedish furniture retailer Ikea across the road offers easy access and means spillover business for both parties. The footwear outlets of Charles & Keith and Pedro are especially popular for their attractive discounts - prices start from \$9 and rarely go beyond \$70.

You can also get merchandise that is exclusive to some of these outlet stores. For instance, Giordano offers polo shirts, tees and tank tops in solid colours, priced from \$8 to \$29, that are made only for its outlet stores.

Cons: The lack of variety, given that there are fewer than 10 outlet stores here. These stores are also unlikely to be a strong draw as all are mass-market brands with affordable pricing in the first place, making bargain hunting less of a thrill.

TOP PICKS FROM ANCHORPOINT

1. **Blue glitter heels, \$24.20 (usual price \$53.90) from Charles & Keith, 01-30** 

These party-ready midnight blue platform heels look more expensive than they are. Perfect for a touch of understated glamour.

2. Checked shorts, \$20 (usual price \$59.90) from Billabong, B1-14

Go preppy in these madras shorts for her from the Australian surfer-inspired brand. The soft cotton material feels good against the skin, and the shorts would go equally well with a swimsuit or with a white button-down shirt.



3. Pink dot T-shirt, \$9 (usual price \$23.90), from Fox, 01-17

This cute top comes in a lovely coral-pink colour and is sprinkled with on-trend polka dots.



4. Turquoise canvas wedges, \$33.20 (usual price \$83), from Pedro, 01-29

Step into the spring fashion season with these sand-coloured canvas wedges with an unexpected bolt of turquoise blue at the back.



5. Black Disney skirt, \$19 (usual price \$33), from Giordano, 01-19

This black skirt with an elastic Barbie pink waist band for girls comes from Giordano's Disney collection. Two removable Minnie Mouse-inspired gloved paws add a dollop of fun. Those aged 12 and above can wear the simple A-line skirt without the paws.



IMM

2 Jurong East Street 21; www.imm.sg (<http://www.imm.sg>)

Opened in 1992, IMM comprises retail, warehouse and office space. The retail space covers slightly more than 400,000 sq ft, while the warehouse and office space take up about 500,000 sq ft. Retail anchor tenants include supermarket Giant and Japanese budget chain Daiso.

The mall had a revamp in 2007, spending \$92.5 million to add a retail block and rooftop landscaped plaza, among other things.

Since May last year, it has been undergoing another renovation, estimated to cost \$30 million, to rebrand itself as an outlet mall. Works are due to be completed in

\$50 million, to rebrand itself as an outlet mall. Works are due to be completed in May this year. There will be a total of 50 outlet stores by then, up from the 19 stores, including Esprit and Timberland, that opened after the 2007 revamp.

The outlet stores will make up about 30 per cent of the retail shops there.

There are currently 39 outlet stores, including more high-end brands such as Agnes b., Coach and Sacoor Brothers. There is also an FJ Benjamin outlet that stocks Banana Republic, Gap and Guess, as well as The Sale Shop which carries labels such as DSquared2, Marella and Max Mara.

Within the next few months, brands such as French Connection, Naf Naf and Tila March will also be stocked there as part of an outlet shop called La Boutique.

Discounts range from 30 to 70 per cent, with many stores offering at least 40 to 50 per cent off most of their items, the bulk of which are up to two seasons old.

Pros: IMM has managed to draw more upmarket brands and decent discounts of 50 per cent or more are good incentives to make your way there. The availability of parking space - 1,300 bays - and free parking for the first three hours daily are other big pluses.

Cons: The location. While just a five-minute walk from Jurong East MRT station, being in the western part of Singapore makes it a bit of a trek for most people. The outlet stores are not all located in the same area so you may need some time to make your way around.

TOP PICKS AT IMM

1. Striped dress, \$92.50 (usual price \$185), from Agnes b., 01-105

This striped T-shirt dress is simple French chic at its best. The quality thick cotton and the little accents – the rope belt and red buttons – give the casual piece a little something extra.



2. Wedges, \$129 (usual price \$180), from Clarks, 01-115

Hop aboard the white shoe trend, which is all the rage now. These bone-coloured cross-strapped wedges have cushy insoles that offer comfort as well as style.



3. Chain bag, \$436 (usual price \$1,090), from Agnes b., 01-105

Gold chain trimming gives this simple black leather shoulder bag an edgy twist.



4. Grey sweater by Gap, \$28 (usual price \$70), from FJB Outlet, 01-102

Adorably chic, this girl's sweater features a Peter Pan collar adorned with sparkling beads. Done in a sophisticated grey, it is a perfect balance of sweet and smart.



5. Leather vest by Max & Co, \$203.60 (usual price \$509), from The Sale Shop, 01-106

This whisper-thin lambskin leather top works in this weather. Worn over a crisp white shirt, the dark navy top offers a textural twist.



6. Skirt, \$39.90 (usual price \$129.90), from Esprit, 01-107

This black-and-white skirt features an interesting design: a crochet front and back, with slimming black panels on the sides.



7. Cocktail dress by Marella, \$207.60 (usual price \$519), from The Sale Shop, 01-106

This head-turning coral pink cocktail dress, with an asymmetrical neckline and sleeve details, is the definition of modern romance.



8. Men's checked shirt, \$47.25 (usual price \$135), from Sacoof Brothers Outlet, 01-15

This checked blue-and-white shirt from the Portuguese label is all preppy polish. While a bit oversized, the look is clean and easily adaptable for both work and play.



9. Men's cargo shorts by Gap, \$34 (usual price \$60), from FIB Outlet, 01-106

9. men's cargo shorts by Gap, \$21 (usual price \$69), from F&B Outlet, 01-102

These khaki cargo shorts are a wardrobe staple for the guy on the go. The knee length makes it presentable enough for a weekend brunch when paired with a smart shirt.

**10. Men's boots, \$219 (usual price \$999), from Timberland, 01-120**

These sturdy boots strike a fine balance between rugged and polished with their shiny leather and hiking boot cut. With savings of more than \$700, they are a steal.

**CHANGI CITY POINT**

5 Changi Business Park Central 1; www.fraserscentrepointmalls.com/malls/ccp
(<http://www.fraserscentrepointmalls.com/malls/ccp>)

The mall, which opened in April last year, boasts landscaped rooftops and green touches, such as open-air bathrooms and a tree-house trail for kids.

Anchor tenants include Cold Storage supermarket, electronics retailer Gain City and two food courts.

The mall is pitched as a family-friendly lifestyle hub and outlet shops help to diversify its offerings.

There are now 14 outlet stores, including Lacoste, Nike, Royal Sporting House and Samsonite. Brands such as Crocs, Lacoste and Skechers are not available in the other two malls.

Changi City Point declined to comment on whether there are plans to add more outlet stores.

Discounts generally go up to 50 per cent, with most items going at 30 to 40 per cent off original retail prices. Merchandise is usually about one to two seasons old, but some shops offer older items.

Pros: Of all the labels there, Lacoste stands out with better discounts - quality merchandise usually sells at for half-price. The mall is designed to appeal to families, which means there are many dining choices as well as playgrounds and enrichment centres. So you can shop in peace while the children are kept occupied. The green touches and spacious corridors also make shopping here a pleasant experience.

Cons: While the mall is a two-minute walk from Expo MRT station, being on the eastern end of the island means it will be out of the way for many people.

The discounts here also pale in comparison to those offered at the other two malls. Most shops offer discounts of only about 30 per cent, and many of the brands can be found elsewhere.

TOP PICKS AT CHANGI CITY POINT**1. Striped shirt, \$29 (usual price \$69), from G2000, 02-36**

Jazz up your workwear with this silky shirt with a touch of mod rocker vibe. Dressed up or down, it will draw attention either way.





2. Sweater, \$21.50 (usual price \$43), from Coldwear, 02-45

Perfect for freezing offices and movie theatres, this sweater comes in a classic cable-knit pattern. Pair it with flared jeans for a 1970s flair.



3. Skirt, \$49 (usual price \$169), from Lacoste, 02-39

The contrasting shades of blue add charm to a simple flared miniskirt and the famous alligator logo is nicely subtle.



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4. T-shirt, \$28 (usual price \$45), from Royal Sporting House, 02-38

This scoop-neck tee from Reebok gives a simple white top an ethnic twist. Too lazy to accessorise? The built-in necklace does the work for you.



5. Laptop backpack, \$70 (usual price \$100), from Samsonite, 02-19

A sporty black-and-red design for those who want both style and function. This backpack by the luggage maker features sleeves inside for both your laptop and tablet.

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