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ACIENDA DESIGNER OUTLET: 'NOT A SINGLE ITEM AT REGULAR PRICE'



crazy quilt
TANYA T. LARA

Acienda Designer Outlet, the country's first outlet mall, is turning one year old in October. The brainchild of Cathay Land president Jeffrey Ng in partnership with international developer Freeport Retail UK, Acienda is a shopping mecca with 130 units of retail space.

People who have visited Acienda have compared it to Japan's Gotemba outlet center, France's La Vallée Village and Italy's luxury outlet The Mall Firenze.

Jeffrey says, "When my wife Vivian and I travel to Europe or the States, she likes to visit outlet centers and that's

where the idea of bringing an outlet mall to the Philippines came from. People travel out of their way, for an hour or two out the city just to be able to get their favorite designer and luxury brands at 30 to 70 percent off the regular price."

He qualifies that what makes a mall an "outlet mall" is that everything is discounted. Shopping centers that have stores offering a mix of regular and discounted prices are not, by nature, real outlet malls.

"At Acienda, not a single item is at regular price," he says, adding that it's a promise they make to their shoppers. "Our tenants are contractually bound to have all their products discounted by at least 30 percent, with some going all the way to 70 to 80 percent off." The only exceptions are products called MMO or merchandise made for outlets that international brands manufacture exclusively for their outlet stores.

Jeffrey relates with a laugh that people call them or send them messages on their Facebook page asking, "When is your sale starting or ending?"

"We keep telling them it's available every day, all year round," he says.

Located on Aguinaldo Highway in Silang, Cavite, Acienda's a quick stop on your way to Tagaytay. "People love going to

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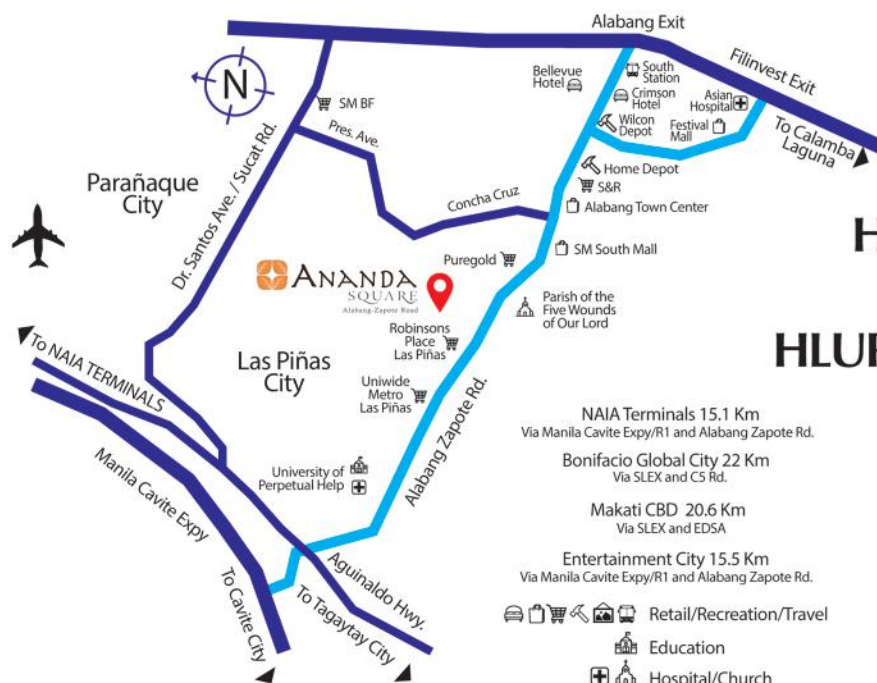
Cathay Land president Jeffrey Ng (right) and Freeport Retail UK co-founder and director Chris Milliken at Acienda Designer Outlet, which is celebrating its first-year anniversary in October.

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Colorful shiplap facade with shutter windows

Acienda... From Page C1

Tagaytay, so they can visit Acienda from or on their way back to Manila. Acienda was master-planned from the very beginning, the hundred-plus stores are side by side with four-meter eaves so shoppers are not exposed to the elements, whether it's too hot or raining. At the same time, we wanted to be the anti-boxy mall that you see in Metro Manila. You don't want shoppers to travel all the way there to be inside a box because they can probably find that within a 15-minute drive from anywhere in Metro Manila."

Acienda Designer Outlet has popular sporting and casualwear brands like Adidas, Onitsuka, Vans, Nike, Oregon, Under Armour, Fila, Oakley, True Religion, Mango, Crocs, Timberland, Terranova, Calliope, Macbeth and a whole lot more.

For shoppers of luxury and mid-market designer bags, there's Via Rodeo, which counts among its brands Bottega Veneta, Prada, Salvatore Ferragamo, Gucci, Valentino, Furla, Bulgari, Fendi, Coach, Kate Spade, Michael Kors, MCM, Tory Burch, Longchamp and Moschino.

I was looking at some Longchamp bags and Kate Spade wallets in Manila and I can tell you that they really are priced lower in Acienda. Via Rodeo also offers the convenience of having all these brands under one roof, which is great for people who haven't decided yet exactly what to buy or which brand. Here, you get to see all of them in one go and it's so easy to compare prices and styles without having to hop from one store to another.

Being in an outlet mall all items are, of course, a season or two late, which doesn't really matter when it comes to jeans or shoes or bags (well, okay, it matters to some).

Jeffrey has a pretty good idea of how most Filipino shoppers behave, saying, "Most Filipinos don't feel the need to wear the current season's shoes, bags and apparel. I felt that an honest-to-goodness outlet mall is perfect for the Philippines."

He says that one thing that surprised Freeport Retail UK co-founder and director Chris Milliken when they were planning Acienda was just how much Filipinos love designer brands, not necessarily the super luxury ones. "He

'Our tenants are contractually bound to have all their products discounted by at least 30 percent, with some going all the way to 70 to 80 percent off,' says Cathay Land president Jeffrey Ng.

was telling me that he had never seen such amount of love for both designer and discount." (Yes, that about sums up our shopping preference.)

Acienda Designer Outlet director Arman Ilano, who's been running the mall since day one, can attest to this love of brand, prompting some companies to push their opening ahead of schedule. "Adidas started as a popup store here to test the water," Arman says. "They said Acienda was not in their pipeline for the year, but they saw the success of their popup and moved their opening ahead especially when they saw how (the shoe brand) Vans was performing. Vans originally had one unit, *pero sobrang daming customers* for three straight weeks, *ubusan talaga ng stocks*. After only a month, they decided to expand by getting the unit beside them and add staff. They sent us a letter asking if they could close for an hour at 4 or 5 p.m. just to restock. They did that for two straight weeks. The managers told us their expectations were very much exceeded."

Each retail space is an average of 144 sqm. and one of the biggest tenants is Oregon, a sporting shoe and apparel store that occupies four units. About 80 to 90 percent of their merchandise is Nike — and boy, it was packed that Sunday in July we were there.

"Our tenants are very happy, most of them are reaching their targets because customers go here to shop," Arman says. "Since it's out of town and a weekend mall, our target market is composed of people from Metro Manila and tourists.



Old-style Dutch windmill in the breezy, open-air plaza surrounded by cafes, restaurants and food stalls.



Come under the shade in the cool breeze of the south.



Acienda Designer Outlet director Arman Ilano at the "Spanish Steps" Photo by MICHAEL VARCAS



Via Rodeo's designer bags are at discounted by at least 30 percent with brands ranging from Gucci to Prada, Furla and Kate Spade.



Acienda Designer Outlet has popular sports, casual apparel and designer brands.

We're looking at tying up with travel agencies, tour groups and P2Ps from hotels in Manila to here."

Freeport Retail UK has outlet malls in Denmark, Slovakia, France, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Portugal and Sweden, etc. The Philippines' Acienda can go toe to toe with any of them in terms of design and overall experience.

Sprawled across four hectares on a 20-hectare property (with 1,300 open parking slots), Acienda has a picture-perfect design that references places around the world.

There's an old Dutch-style windmill that doubles as a restaurant on the ground floor and a viewing deck on the second floor in the middle of an open-air plaza surrounded by food stalls (many of them homegrown in Cavite) and restaurants. There's a Spanish Steps-style staircase and on the other side the crooked street of Lombard in San Francisco. There are store facades reminiscent of Amsterdam's houses on the canal and colorful Hamptons shiplap facades with shutter windows.

Stores that are currently being constructed are boarded up with photo murals (like of Tuscany and Venice) that are selfie backgrounds.

It's a pretty place, especially when evening falls and the colorful lights are switched on. One of our advertising executives told me it's even prettier around Christmas, when the rice lights and holiday décor are out.

By next month, about 90 percent of the stores will be open and by Christmas perhaps all of them. So grab your sweater for some outlet holiday shopping.

But Jeffrey Ng isn't done with Acienda yet. "We're planning to put up a hotel, conference facilities, residential condominiums and even offices around Acienda in the future," he says.

Then he adds with a grin, "We have more land in the area."

Of course they do. This is the guy who, as a young man holding the reins of Cathay Land, began land banking in Cavite believing the development would go further south of Metro Manila— or perhaps he steered it that way, all the way to his 1,500 hectares.

"We're quite bullish," he says. "We're even considering putting up outlets around the country, probably one north of Manila, and in the Visayas and Mindanao."

For more information, visit www.aciendadesigneroutlet.com and download the Acienda Rewards app.

Visit the author's travel blog at www.findingmyway.net. Follow her on Instagram and Twitter @iamtanyalara.