A COVID Survivor Story - How One Mall Was Spared By The Pandemic While Others Were Left Dead

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For those living in the South Bay of California, the Del Amo Fashion Center is a staple. Located in Torrance, it stands at over 2.5 million square feet across three floors, holding the title for sixth largest mall in the U.S. And it’s had an impact on people well beyond California as the filming location for projects like Quentin Tarantino’s Jackie Brown and the hit show Euphoria. Shopping centers have become a huge part of American culture and act as a shared space for communities. I’ve gone with friends to sit in the food court for hours to hang out when we have nowhere else to go. It’s likely others feel this sense of community about their malls.

But do all malls stand equally? The aftermath of the pandemic indicates no. Del Amo reopened on May 29, 2020 and since then has been brought back to life with busy traffic. But this is not the case for many other malls which have essentially become dead malls even after we’ve left the height of the pandemic and are back to a more stable sense of normalcy.

Just 3 miles away from Del Amo stands another mall – the South Bay Galleria, standing at under 1 million square feet.

There are 300 brands featured in Del Amo’s large space, along with over 50 food options, whereas the Galleria includes less than half of Del Amo’s 300 stores and under 20 eating options. Around 15 stores have closed in the past couple years, including popular ones like Victoria’s Secret and just last month H&M.

Prior to the pandemic, the Galleria was a prominent mall to shop, eat, and hang out. But now the change in traffic is noticeable – which isn’t the case for Del Amo. A quick Google search can reveal traffic, with Del Amo having over 4,000 more Google reviews than the Galleria. Locals visiting Del Amo expect to drive around the parking lot a few times before finding a space, wait in long lines at the food court, and feel crowded in stores surrounded by fellow shoppers. A visit to the Galleria used to be like this, but now is the opposite with empty lots and hardly any crowd. And locals going in 2023 can feel this difference.

One resident who lives a 5 minute drive from the Galleria and a 15 minute drive from Del Amo chooses to make the longer commute, saying, “I don’t go to the Galleria anymore because half of the stores I liked closed down… I was gonna say it’s dead… It just seems empty and sad so I’d rather go to Del Amo…”

Its smaller space left the South Bay Galleria vulnerable to the harsh economy that came with the pandemic. Locals might enjoy visiting larger malls to have access to more stores, walk around a larger space, or even just to feel a sense of community, especially given the isolation of quarantine. And tourists are more likely to visit the biggest mall in the area. Whatever the reasons, it’s clear that the large mall was able to weather the pandemic better. Del Amo Fashion Center continues to thrive and even now seems just as lively as it was before the pandemic and its size was a definite factor in this.