

Mega-mall is world's largest — and it's still growing



Popping out to the shops is not what it used to be — at least not in Edmonton, Alberta.

There, the West Edmonton Mall challenges the imagination. It's not just a mega-mall — the biggest in the world; it is also a tourist attraction, zoo, aquarium, entertainment complex, hotel... and more.

The 11 department stores and 817 other shops strung out along a one-mile-long concourse are just the beginning. For the four Ghermezian brothers, the developers of the mall, firmly believe that shopping should be both entertaining and exciting.

As a result, the new \$900 million mall includes Canada Fantasyland — a Disneyworld rival with rides, a video arcade, a full-sized ice hockey rink, an 18-hole miniature golf course, aquariums, aviaries and animals that range from donkeys to tigers.

It has 20 cinemas and theatres, plus a number of specialised areas that offer gourmet dining with menus from around the world.

And it has an indoor lake with four computer-controlled submarines that seat 24 people each. They cruise beneath the lake taking shoppers and tourists for a 15 minute, thrill-packed ride.

They will be attacked by a giant mechanical shark,

experience an underwater dynamite blast, and discover long lost treasure from a sunken ship — all the while cruising past Caribbean coral reefs, tropical fish of every description, real sharks and barracuda and animated figures involved in underwater activities.

The indoor lake also has an authentic Spanish galleon and a marine theatre that features performances by four trained dolphins.

And that's just the beginning.

A Fantasyland Hotel will be built by this autumn, adjacent to the mall and overlooking the waterpark. Its 360 rooms will have theme decorations from six countries.

The Hollywood floor will feature 1950s neon, a patented carpet with tiny twinkling lights throughout, bubble machines and a black tile spa in the bedroom.

Guests who stay in the Polynesian rooms will float on a warrior catamaran under full sail, surrounded by water. And for those with true adventurous spirits, the hotel will give them the chance to sleep in beds that have been modelled out of antique trucks.

Shopping for the family groceries may never be the same again.

