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### Travel & Holiday

## Dream terminal

Good navigation, touches of culture and greenery would make the new Changi T4 stand out, say travellers

[The Straits Times](#) - April 10, 2012

By: Natasha Ann Zachariah and Yip Wai Yee

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-- ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

With three award-winning airport terminals here, Singaporeans are spoilt for good service and facilities.

But there is always room for improvement.

The Changi Airport Group announced last month that a new terminal will be built. Terminal 4, or T4, will be an upgrade of the six-year-old Budget Terminal and is slated to be completed in 2017. It will be able to handle 16 million passengers a year - more than twice the seven million passengers the current Budget Terminal can handle.

At 28,200 sq m, it will be the smallest of the four terminals, with Terminal 3 the biggest at 380,000 sq m.

With tenders on T4's design currently being called from local and international firms, architects, designers and frequent travellers tell Life! what they would like to see in the new terminal, from better shopping options to more greenery and even study centres and spas.

#### Better navigation

Upon arriving at their destination, all travellers want efficient and hassle-free navigation through the airport and Customs.

Hence, Mr Michael Hosking, 52, managing director of regional concert organiser Midas Promotions, would like to see 'moving walkways from the furthest gates upon arrival'.

Allan Wu, 39, Chinese-American actor and former host of The Amazing Race Asia, suggests that the new terminal offer alternate modes of transport.

'It might be cool to see people zipping around on Segways. It will be a faster way to get from Customs to the terminal,' he says, referring to the batteryoperated two-wheel transportation device where the user stands and leans forward to move it.

But even without such fancy gadgets, Terminal 4 must be connected to the rest of the airport, say travellers.

Users of Budget Terminal, which the new facility replaces, have criticised it for being isolated from the other three terminals, which are linked by travelling walkways as well as the Sky Train.

To reach Budget Terminal from the other terminals, travellers need to take a shuttle bus.

Mr Lim Teck, 36, managing director of film distribution and production company Clover Films, says: 'I try as much as I can not to fly from Budget Terminal because it's inconvenient to get there. So I hope that the future T4 will be connected to the other terminals by the Sky Train.'

'Not only will this be easier for travellers to get to T4, but those waiting around for flights can also easily visit the other terminals' dining and retail options if they get bored.'

#### Greenery and natural light

Singapore is famous the world over for being a 'garden city', so many people whom Life! spoke to say they would love to see that green side feature prominently in the design of the new terminal.

There are already plenty of nature elements included in the existing three terminals, such as trees and koi ponds, and Terminal 3 has won some notable awards for its green features, including a Gold Award from the Landscape Industry Association, Singapore, for its green walls and landscaping in 2009. But architects say that even more could be done.

Mr Tan Kok Hiang, director of Forum Architects, says: 'In Terminal 3, you have interior green walls. T4 should continue in this vein, but in a bolder and more naturalistic way.'

'The airport experience can be about being in a tropical forest as opposed to being in an airport which just has manicured elements of green. From a sustainability point of view, this approach also offers many opportunities to create an energy- and resource-conscious airport.'

Having more greenery also helps to relax stressed travellers, he adds.

'Travellers are naturally stressed by being away from home, so airports should lessen this stress and promote a positive and happy feeling. The 'garden city' look is warm and congenial, and is a neutral and universal concept that all travellers can identify with.'

Suggestions were also made for the inclusion of more natural light, the way the clear glass ceilings in Terminal 3 brighten up the place.

Mr Dennis Goh, deputy director of Singapore Polytechnic's School Of Architecture, says: 'Natural light coming in through the T3 ceiling is good because it helps travellers get a good sense of the time of day. Travellers are already so disoriented and tired, so this will help them feel more secure in an unknown place.'

'It's not good if you model the terminal like most malls here, where you feel like you are trapped inside with no idea of what's going on outside.'

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Ms Chan Hui Min, an architect, says: 'The natural light in the immigration arrival area at Terminal 3 makes it feel like it's never overcrowded when there are two plane-loads of people being processed at the same time. This really makes a difference when the 'typical' anonymous airport - popularised in movies such as *The Terminal* (2004) - is loud, overcrowded, busy and stressful.'

Mr Tan says: 'Bright spaces have a better chance of being cheery.'

#### A touch of Singapore culture

A country or city introduces itself to newcomers through its airport. So it is logical for airports to 'reflect the spirit of the place they represent and respond to specific cultural needs', says Mr Mouzhan Majidi, chief executive of Foster + Partners, the international architecture firm behind the acclaimed designs of Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok Airport and Beijing's Terminal 3, which was completed in 2008.

Using the new Beijing airport terminal as an example, he adds: 'Beijing International Airport is a building born of its context. This is expressed in its dragon-like form and the drama of the soaring roof that is a blaze of traditional Chinese colours - imperial reds merging into golden yellows.'

Frequent traveller and architect Chan Hui Min says: 'I like airports that make an effort to bring the local identity to the airport experience. The Amsterdam Airport has a mini Rijksmuseum that features a small revolving collection of Dutch masterpieces and a museum shop. This brings a nice authentic piece of the city into the airport experience.'

Changi's Terminal 4 should do the same.

President of the Singapore Institute of Architects, Mr Ashvinkumar Kantilal, says: 'One interesting feature would be to incorporate an interactive aviation gallery or museum within the public and non-securitized areas in the four terminal buildings to showcase the development of the aviation history in the region and how Singapore has played a pivotal role and what its future is that lies ahead.'

Mr Dennis Goh, deputy director of Singapore Polytechnic's School Of Architecture, suggests T4 include local art.

'The airport is a very good space to showcase the work of some of our local artists. They can have temporary art installations or more permanent objects, such as having art incorporated into the walls or floors. MRT stations have sculptures and calligraphy done by local artists spread throughout. Why not have more of that in our airport too?'

Local magic performer Ning Cai, better known as Magic Babe Ning, took a nine-month-long trip around the world last year, covering countries such as Morocco, Mauritius and Madagascar.

She says she would love to see an entire area dedicated to all things Singaporean, whether it be food or film.

The 29-year-old says: 'We should definitely have a special retail compound selling local works such as Singapore film, music, fashion, art and the best of Singapore delicacies such as Hainanese chicken rice and laksa, since food is our culture.'

Taking cues from Germany's Frankfurt Airport, she adds, for an extra dash of fun: 'While walking through the Frankfurt Airport, you find at every 50m or so, a hot beverage counter with a selection of teas, coffees and hot chocolate. We can also have that in Changi, as well as Singapore Sling counters offering complimentary drinks for adults who have just touched down.'

#### Interior design

When it comes to the interior design of the new terminal, architects and frequent travellers say that they would like it to be bright and cheery. This includes more generous splashes of colour throughout, whether it be in the materials used for the furniture and walls, or in the public signages.

Says Mr Bobby Cheng, 34, principal architect of Brewin Concepts who formerly worked at French architect firm Atelier Jean Nouvel: 'I would love to see a mature and forward-thinking interior fit-out, perhaps one that doesn't refer to only stone glass and greys such as the Hong Kong and Japanese airports, but one that can include state-of-the-art decorative features, holographic information systems for advertisements and large-scale media panels, on top of the ample 'distractions' we already showcase in the existing terminals.'

Others also spoke of the need for the new terminal to be a place that can relax weary travellers.

Mr Tan Kok Hiang, director of Forum Architects, suggests the creation of 'niches for private contemplation or small groups to gather'.

He adds: 'This will also help prevent big groups from dominating the open spaces which tend to create a rowdy rather than calm atmosphere. Also, the terminal should have a decor that should be warm and human in scale. It should be contemplative and not too busy, as a calm mood is necessary to soothe anxious travellers.'

'It can incorporate soothing music and the sound of water, for example, but not noise from a conversation-disrupting water feature. And the most important of all, a well-designed terminal needs to have an intuitive way of locating venues within the airport. Short of this, signage with the right-size fonts, direction and colour are imperative.'

And the ground on which travellers tread when they are in Changi Airport?

While architect and frequent flier Chan Hui Min says she likes the current look of the carpets at Changi, calling it 'luxurious', there are those who disagree with her.

Mr Tyler Brule, editor of lifestyle magazine *Monocle* and a columnist for *Financial Times Weekend*, is one such critic.

On the look for T4, he has only this to say: 'Hopefully, no more hideous carpets - Changi has to have the ugliest carpeting in the world.'

#### Architecture: Building exterior

The Mumbai Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport has its terminal made to resemble a dancing peacock tail, while at Qatar's soon-to-launch New Doha International Airport, the undulating roof is designed to look like sand dunes.

All around the world, architects are challenging the notion of an airport as a largely squarish, grey building where airplanes just land and take off.

So, when it comes to Terminal 4, how could its exterior look?

Mr Paul Lawrence, director of Lisis, an architectural hardware system specialist company, says that architects and designers could move away from heavy and grey steel structures, and instead use glass structures externally to make use of Singapore's tropical climate, where it sees much sunlight throughout the year.

Explains the 62-year-old, who has previously worked on the glass structures in Dubai's Terminal 3 and the Sharjah International Airport in United Arab Emirates: 'Singapore has beautiful sunlight all year round, which should be utilised. Simple canopies can be created outside. Using two layers of glass for the facade and design it with patterns and shading to keep out the heat.'

While a pretty building is a plus, architects caution against placing too much emphasis on how the facade should look. Functionality, they say, should come first.

Mr Vikas Gore, director for DP Architects, the firm behind the Mumbai airport design, says: 'The main reason Singapore's airport has so often been voted at or near the top of airport rankings worldwide is that it works so well and not because it looks good.'

'While it is important for an airport to have individuality and identity, it is easy to overstate the significance of an exciting exterior envelope.'

Mr Ashvinkumar Kantilal, president of the Singapore Institute of Architects, agrees that the design of the new terminal is 'a great opportunity presented to Singapore to have its own icon', but adds that while design plays an important role, it 'cannot be an all-subsuming role'.

#### **Better retail mix**

These are words that get any shopaholic traveller excited: duty-free shopping.

But while shopping and dining options are abundant - there are more than 290 retail and services stores, and more than 130 food and beverage establishments across the four terminals - travellers are hoping for more choices, especially affordable outlets.

Ms Susie Martin, 39, general manager at Servcorp Singapore, a serviced and virtual office provider, travels almost every week for business around the region.

She sometimes has to buy gifts for her seven-year-old daughter and her husband for special occasions such as their birthdays.

'As I spend a lot of time in the airport, I do a bit of shopping there while I'm on the go. I just buy something on my way out,' says Ms Martin, who finds the current shopping options too expensive for frequent shoppers.

'I can't afford to buy a present from Louis Vuitton or Prada every time. It's a bit much for a child.'

Mr Jerry De Souza, 40, creative director of Spa Esprit Group, would like to see more exciting shop displays and more artisanal local restaurants in the terminal such as Esquina by hotelier Loh Lik Peng and Greek restaurant Blu Kouzina.

He adds: 'I would like to see an inclusion of one-stop departmental stores such as Selfridges or Barneys, with amazing window displays. I would like to experience an airport that is out of the norm of a standard airport.'

It would be good for the new terminal to have a variety of options to cater to different types of travellers, says Mr Vikas Gore, director of DP Architects. He says that having more retail and F&B opportunities in a terminal is 'potentially a win-win proposition'.

'Yields from rental and sales can make a significant contribution to a terminal's revenue. At the same time, the space can provide Singaporeans a different environment from a traditional mall.'

#### **More varied amenities**

One common peeve of travellers around the world is sitting around during hours of transit with nothing to do. No entertainment options, no comfortable sleeping areas and most important of all, nothing to eat, especially when you are in transit at odd hours of the night.

According to Mr Daniel Dittmar, owner of Focus Pilates, which has branches at Raffles Place and Orchard Road, Changi Airport has managed to keep its passengers entertained and comfortable with its range of facilities and entertainment options across terminals 1 to 3.

Mr Dittmar, who travels about twice a month within the region, hopes to see this aspect being taken into account at the new terminal.

The 36-year-old says: 'Currently, you can even go on a free tour of Singapore if you have a layover of five hours or more. This goes the extra mile with the sole purpose of turning a potentially uncomfortable layover into an enjoyable experience and promotes Singapore for future visits.'

Aside from considering the needs of travellers, Changi Airport also caters to Singaporeans who use the airport as a shopping mall, dinner destination and even a study area. This is something unique to Singapore because the country is small enough for people to go to the airport for leisure and entertainment.

The original concept of a terminal has changed and is no longer solely for catching a flight, says Mr John Ting, former president at the Singapore Institute of Architects.

'There is down time in the airports, where it is quiet, with only a few flights coming in. It could be an integrated destination with elements of play, educational classes and even sports, with air travel being one of its purposes,' says Mr Ting, now the principal consultant architect at A.I.M & Associates. 'But the functional part has still got to be there. The architects have to integrate it well.'

Mr Lim Teck, 36, managing director of film distribution and production company Clover Films, takes his three-year-old son to Changi Airport every Sunday morning.

'My son loves all the different terminals at Changi because there is so much for him to do there. We spend on an average two to three hours every time we are there. My son likes to take the Sky Train to the different terminals and we go to the arcade and also look at the waterfall. There is a lot for him to do there.'

'But I hope that there will be even more free playgrounds built for kids in the new terminal. It's a good place for children to have some fun, and because it's air-conditioned, parents feel relaxed too.'

#### **Handicap/Elderly friendly**

The demographics of visitors to Singapore are set to change in the future, with the older set of travellers being targeted by marketers and travel companies, especially for travel within this region.

In an article last December by The Straits Times on silver travel for those aged 45 years old and above, major travel agencies told the paper then that silver travellers formed 30 to 40 per cent of their customer base, with year-on-year growth of 5 to 10 per cent.

Disabled people, from those who are wheelchair-bound to those who are blind, are also travelling more, although there are no official statistics.

Mr John Ting, former president at the Singapore Institute of Architects and principal Consultant Architect at A.I.M & Associates, says Singapore is a great destination for silver-haired tourists and the disabled because the island is small and easy to get around.

As such, the country should be well-fitted for these travellers and sensitive to their needs.

Mr Ting says: 'The new terminal should be a place to show that Singapore welcomes everyone.'

He adds that it need not just be in physical design alone, but should extend to offering services and using technology to help these travellers get around without much difficulty.

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