

# THE STRAITS TIMES

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>> [Back to the article](#)

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Mandai to get new nature attraction on 30-hectare site

The aim: A cluster of green-themed offerings in the area that will help to draw more tourists

By Lim Wei Chean

AT LEAST one more nature-themed attraction will spring up in Mandai by 2015.

The Government will, in the middle of next year, release a 30ha site - roughly three times the size of VivoCity mall - for developing such an attraction.

The site can house a back-to-nature resort, a wildlife-themed restaurant, or anything with a nature theme that a developer can dream up.

Such a move will widen the range of tourism offerings by creating a cluster of nature-based attractions in Mandai, which is already home to the Zoo, the Night Safari and the Mandai Orchid Garden.

Minister of State for Trade and Industry S. Iswaran, who opened a new cheetah habitat in the Zoo yesterday, said: 'An increasing number of tourists are keen to commune with nature, visit natural habitats and see wildlife - perhaps as a counterpoint to the modern urban lifestyle.'

These nature-themed attractions, together with the integrated resorts, the Formula One race, the Gardens by the Bay and the Singapore Flyer, are meant to get Singapore closer to snagging 17 million visitors who will spend \$30 billion here by 2015.

Meanwhile, Wildlife Reserves Singapore, which manages the Zoo and Night Safari, is developing a freshwater-themed animal attraction within its 89-ha compound.

To be ready by 2015, this will be the third attraction in Wildlife Reserves' stable.

The company will also put \$70 million over the next five years into improving the Zoo and Night Safari, by adding more trams, building new wildlife zones and creating more restaurants, for example.

The Zoo and Night Safari now pull in 2.5 million visitors a year, but with the new attractions in place, the Singapore Tourism Board expects Mandai's visitor numbers to double by 2015.

Former Zoo chief Bernard Harrison said Mandai was due for a shot in the arm, as it has been more than a decade since the Night Safari opened there.

Ms Ng Lee Li, a section head for the Tourism Academy @ Sentosa, said the cluster will mean that the attractions there can tap each other's spillover visitors.

She added that making the 30ha plot a 'lifestyle' kind of attraction with accommodation, food and beverage and retail outlets will bring in nature lovers and non-nature lovers alike.

CTC Holidays' senior manager of outbound tours Jocelyn Su noted that more Singaporeans, too, have been flocking to countries like Australia and Malaysia in search of a connection with nature.

She said she has seen up to 40 per cent more bookings in the last two years for holidays to places like Taiwan and Hokkaido, where a stay in a forest lodge or trekking in a mangrove swamp is on the itinerary.

To her comment that Singapore's nature-themed attractions will go up against these countries' offerings, Mr Iswaran said that while Singapore could not compete in terms of size, it could do so in the quality department.

He added: 'If you come to the zoo here, you wouldn't think that five minutes away are Housing Board flats and 20 minutes away is the Central Business District.'

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## » GREEN ATTRACTION

### » WHAT

The 30ha site is approximately three times the size of VivoCity.

### » WHEN

The Singapore Tourism Board will open the tender to get proposals by the middle of next year, and award it by year-end.

### » CONCEPT

The site can be developed into a mixed-use attraction that includes accommodation such as a back-to-nature lodge, lifestyle offerings such as spa treatments in a nature setting, as well as activities like trekking or canoeing.

**NEXT BIG TOURISM SITE?: Part of the 30ha plot which the Government will release for development.**

