

More gyms sprouting here

BY JACQUELINE WOO

SINGAPORE is on the road to becoming gym central, going by how chains here are beefing up their number of outlets.

A MyPaper check with eight fitness-centre brands here, including mainstream names like Fitness First and boutique gyms like Ritual, found that all are going on an expansion blitz.

Demand, they said, is being fuelled by time-starved Singaporeans who want more one-stop locations to exercise and shower in double-quick time. And people here are also becoming more health conscious, they said.

Fitness First wants to make sure it captures the demand. It will open three new clubs here by

June, in areas like Buona Vista and Tanjong Pagar.

This is on top of having opened a 21,000 sq ft club in Market Street last month, and another in Jurong East in December.

The 15-outlet chain's managing director, Mr Anthony Tottman, said he expects demand to grow, as gymgoers look for facilities that come with "ease of access and convenience".

Home-grown chain Sky Fitness, which first opened at Harbourfront Tower in 2006, will open two new outlets in the northern and western suburbs of Singapore by the first quarter of next year.

Virgin Active, an established chain in Britain owned by British billionaire Richard Branson, dropped its anchor here last year



THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME: Gyms like Ritual (above) in North Canal Road are set on expanding here. Demand, they said, is being fuelled by time-starved Singaporeans who want more one-stop locations to exercise and shower. PHOTO: THE STRAITS TIMES

as well. It plans to open at least six clubs here over the next five years.

These chains were recently joined by United States-based chain Anytime Fitness, which opened its first 24-hour club here in Woodlands in October. It plans to open 100 more by 2019.

Other gyms set on expanding include boutique gyms Ritual in North Canal Road and Physical Abuse in Havelock Road, as well as women-only gym Vivafit, whose flagship outlet is in Raffles Place.

But experts warn that vying

for a slice of the pie in such a saturated market could be challenging.

Dr Nitin Pangarkar, an associate professor of strategy and policy at the National University of Singapore's Business School, is less than optimistic. Few of the chains here, he said, will survive the intense competition in the long run.

"There will definitely be exits for those that fail to attract a good base of customers, especially the less-skilled, the less-experienced, and those that can't stand the heat," he explained.

Dr Seshan Ramaswami, associate professor of marketing at Singapore Management University, said that more entrepreneurs may be "trying to cash in" as Singaporeans get more health conscious.

But he also pointed out that, even within a saturated market, differentiation is possible, such as new types of classes, female-only gyms and longer operating hours.

"The benefits to consumers are obvious, at least for the near future – more choices, more convenience and, perhaps at some point, lower prices," he said.

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