

For the Webpage of the Basilica of Our Lady of the Mount:

Clarification Regarding Stall Allotment and Pricing at Bandra Fair 2024

1: What is the purpose of this announcement?

There have been a number of reports in the newspapers on the issue of stall allotment for the Bandra fair. While the Press have endeavoured to be fair, it was felt that a more detailed explanation would be useful.

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2: What is the primary goal of the Basilica?

The primary goal of the Basilica is to facilitate and encourage devotion to Mother Mary, affectionately called Our Lady of the Mount, who has interceded and helped Her supplicants for so many years. The main purpose of the Church was and remains devotional, not the planning and allotment of stalls.

3: What do the stalls have to do with the Basilica?

The Background to the stalls at the Fair:

Traditionally, the Nativity of Mother Mary was celebrated in September with Novena Masses in the Basilica. The Bandra Fair developed around the Masses, to allow the pilgrims and devotees, many of whom travel long distances, to get food, snacks/ condiments and celebrate with their families. While the number of visitors has reduced over the years, there are still enough numbers to require that the Church, the BMC, the Police and Fire Department deploy a lot of resources.

4: How did the Basilica work out the price this year?

The Basis of Pricing:

This year, the Basilica has upgraded the facilities for the convenience of devotees and pilgrims, many of whom have come from far away.

- Water supply has been improved by rain water harvesting.
- The toilet facilities have been expanded and upgraded. New sewage lines have been laid. The facilities have been made disabled friendly with ramps
- A covered area has been planned for pilgrims to rest.
- The steps used by visitors have been repaired, reinforced.
- Paved platforms have been reconstructed for the stalls.
- The Basilica is constructing stalls with fire-resistant materials.

In order to recover these costs over a period of time, the Basilica initially sought a higher rental on the larger stalls, closer to the church, which are generally operated by commercial entities, to subsidise the lower rentals on the smaller stalls, generally operated by families. The cost of Rs. 3000/square foot quoted by the newspapers applied *only to the larger stalls*. Overall, the *average rental per stall* works out to Rs. 1500/square foot.

In pricing the stalls this way, the Basilica was guided by the fact that many of the stall allottees are subletting their stalls to commercial entities at 3 to 5 times the amount paid to the Basilica.

In comparison to this, the BMC has put in an advertisement in the Times of India dated 19-08-2024 stating that forms for this bidding process are available for Rs. 540/- + GST per form, which is non-refundable. The minimum bidding amount for a pitch 1.5 mtrs x 1.5 mtrs (2.25 sq mtrs or 24.22 sqft.), is Rs. 1,17,899.00, which works out to Rs. 4867.84/square foot only for the pitch. The additional expenses of construction of the stall, electricity, etc have to be borne by the bidder. Last year, after auctioning, their rate was Rs. 4950/square foot only for the pitch.

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The Basilica, on the other hand, is constructing stalls to BMC specifications and leasing them out. The stall holder does not have to invest additional amount for the structure, and electricity.

5: Did the Church not discuss these issues with the people?

These facts and the costs incurred by the Basilica was discussed with representatives of the local resident bidders by the Vice Rector, Fr. Sunder Albuquerque, on 9-August-2024. As people appealed for a revision, the rates were revised to Rs. 900 per square foot. The revised rates were explained to all the resident bidders personally by the Auxiliary Bishop Savio Fernandes on 12-August-2024.

This price reduction underlines that the stall allotment is not the main interest of the Basilica. The Basilica is prepared to not recover the costs incurred, as long as it promotes and facilitates devotion to Mother Mary.

6: How are the stalls allotted?

Method of allotting stalls:

The stalls are allotted by the random picking of lots (Lucky Dip) which ensures the complete absence of any partiality or bias. There has been a demand that there should be a preferential allotment of plots to local residents who have been allotted stalls in previous years. In the interest of transparency, the preferential allotment system was discontinued in 2023.

This again was explained to the local residents by the Vice Rector on 13-August-2024 and by the Auxiliary Bishop on 12-August-2024.

Today, many minds can be influenced by false or incomplete narratives. The Basilica is putting out this information to be completely fair and transparent. Please contact us for any clarification. Please do share this information with other well-wishers.

Fr Vernon Mark Aguiar

Rector: Basilica of Our Lady of the Mount

August 20, 2024