

Shoppers feel economy's chill as year draws to a close
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By Lee Wei Lian

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 24 — City malls decked out in glittering Christmas decorations appeared to be bustling with people during the biggest shopping season of the year but many were walking around empty handed, enjoying the sights but not opening their wallets.

Many shoppers and shops alike say that this has been a quieter festive season as companies start tightening their belts in anticipation of slower global economic growth next year.

Tan, the proprietor of the popular Penang Flavours cafe in 1Utama, arguably Petaling Jaya's most successful mall, said that sales have dropped this year as compared to 2010.

"Last year's peak period was six weeks starting in November, but this year, it only started last week," she said.

She added that the mall itself also seemed quieter than during Christmas last year.

A manager at one of the mall's many jewellery shops looked out wistfully at the milling crowds, not many of whom seemed inclined to step in to splurge on a year end luxury gift.

A longview of the various stores in 1Utama well-lit up.

The manager, who wished to remain anonymous, said that things started to slow down after September.

"Frankly speaking, sales are not so good as compared to last year," he said. "The purchasing power of consumers is just not there."

Zack, a student, said that sales at his father's company had fallen and that could be a sign that the economy is slowing.

"Of course it will affect shoppers," he said while browsing one of the festive season kiosks in the mall with a friend.

Over at MidValley City, probably KL's most popular mall, crowds were more international with many tourists and overseas Malaysians returning home for a holiday.

Jane, the wife of an expatriate, said however that the festive mood appeared more subdued this year.

"It does seem quieter," she noted as she headed to her car with her holiday purchases.

Lai, who works in the events and entertainment industry was enjoying the mall's Christmas decorations with his family.

He shared that while he was usually busy during this period as that was the time companies throw a year end party or go on a company trip, such budgets have been cut by as much 20

per cent.

Kuala Lumpur's Mid Valley Megamall and its Christmas trees.
"Instead of going overseas, they go to a local destination," he said.

Some categories such as gadgets however appeared to be less affected.

One manager of an electronic goods store said that sales were still holding up although the outlook for next year was uncertain.

"Maybe it's because there are a lot of new gadgets that have been introduced and people like to buy gadgets," said the manager who declined to be identified.

At the topmost level of the mall, where the youth oriented outlets are clustered, some shoppers appeared more optimistic.

A young adult who only wanted to be known as Anita said that the crowds appeared to be the same as last year.

"If I had more time to shop, I would spend even more," she said laughing before heading off in the direction of the cinema with her group.

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