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Feature Article

## Enjoy the Spirit of Christmas

It's that time of the year once again when towns/cities will be bustling with shoppers moving around to check the 'specials', discounts and promotions which will be on offer - all in the spirit to celebrate Christmas.

Many consumers always look forward to Christmas and New Year to shop for household items, white goods and electronic items apart from spending on eateries and gifts for the loved ones.

Like any other festival, there is lots of impulsive buying, little comparative shopping as many consumers are driven by the enticing advertisements, loud music played in stores and sales tricks such as 'zero dollar' deposit deals.

While, discounts and special deals are a good news for consumers, some consumers end up spending their hard earned money on items which may be of poor quality, are sub-standard and on pre-packed food items which may be nearing expiry dates.

There is so much rush, particularly when consumers leave their shopping for the last minute that they end up in stores which may not be offering them items at the cheapest rate in town.

Market surveillance by the Consumer Council of Fiji over the year's show that some traders try and rid off their old stock during such time. Some of these items are not of merchantable quality and may not be fit for the purpose. In some cases highlighted to the Council previously, a few traders have put out misleading advertisements to attract consumers.

The Council believes that consumers should enjoy their shopping by making the most of the 'specials' and discounts, at the same time, they should be vigilant about the quality and price of the items they are purchasing. There is no harm in double-checking the price and asking questions to the traders about the quality of the item.

If it is a hire-purchase deal then the consumers must spend time in reading the agreement so that they fully understand the warranty issues, raise questions about the availability of the back-up service and about the interest they will be paying.

Here are some tips for a savvy Christmas this year:

- **Draw up a list with its average cost**– write down all required items for the festive season and prioritize them according to high and low priority products. This will not only help you purchase the most important items first but also sustain your budget
- **Make the most of specials and promotions** – but at the same time, avoid being swayed by all you see in dailies, TV and hear on radio. Check out what you really require specifically for the festival
- **If you are planning to decorate your house**– you can consider recycling last year’s decorations which are still in good condition.
- **Avoid bulk buying** –only spend on the number of items in its required quantity for the festival. Do not purchase in bulk just because items are on special as it may be nearing its expiry dates
- **Check your purchase**- test those lights or white goods before buying and check for expiry/best before dates on edible items
- **Make healthy choices** – with rise in Non Communicable Diseases in the country, try and shift your focus on healthier dishes which can nourish consumer positively while maintaining the spirit of Christmas

Consumers must remember that festivals have significance, thus, celebrations to mark such occasions should be centred on its meaning.

The Council wishes all consumers a happy and safe Christmas and joyous and productive New Year.