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FEATURE ARTICLE

Consumer Awareness During Diwali in Fiji

As Diwali approaches, the festive spirit fills the air, homes are decorated with beautiful lights, and families prepare to celebrate this auspicious occasion with joy and enthusiasm. Diwali, or the "Festival of Lights," is one of the most anticipated times of the year. This period is marked by increased shopping activity, with consumers purchasing everything from sweets and clothing to household items, electronics, and even vehicles. However, amidst all the celebrations, it is crucial for consumers to remain vigilant and mindful of potential issues that could arise during this shopping season.

While the festive season brings about a heightened sense of joy, it also creates opportunities for unscrupulous traders to take advantage of consumers. Common practices such as price gouging, deceptive advertisements, and the sale of substandard goods are not uncommon. With increased demand, there may be instances where prices of goods are inflated, which can lead to consumers overpaying for products they could otherwise acquire at a fair price.

This article will shed light on essential consumer tips to ensure a smart and safe Diwali shopping experience in Fiji.

1. Beware of Price Gouging

One of the most common concerns during festive seasons like Diwali is price gouging. Price gouging refers to the unethical practice of inflating prices on goods and services in response to increased demand. As Diwali approaches, the cost of essential items such as oil, ghee, flour and sugar may rise. Likewise, the cost of household decorations, clothing, and electronics can also surge.

In Fiji, where most imported goods are subject to fluctuations in supply and demand, it is crucial for consumers to remain vigilant about any sudden and unjustified price hikes. Traders may take advantage of the Diwali rush, hiking up prices without valid reasons. The Consumer Council of Fiji has continuously raised awareness about price gouging and encourages consumers to report any suspicious activities.

2. Comparative Shopping: Do not Buy Without Research

Head Office

Level 5 Vanua House
Victoria Parade GPO, Suva
Phone: 3300792/3310183
CEO: 3305864
Fax: 3300115
Email: complaints@consumersfiji.org

Lautoka/West

Suite 4 Popular Building
Vidilo Street
P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka
Phone: 6664987
Email: consumerlkt@connect.com.fj

Labasa/North

Shop 2, Mudaliar Investment
Sangam Avenue Street
P.O. Box 64, Labasa
Phone: 8812559
Email: colbs@connect.com.fj



With so many stores offering "Diwali discounts" and special promotions, it can be tempting to grab the first offer you see. However, before making any significant purchases, it is wise to do some comparative shopping. In the age of digital technology, comparing prices has never been easier. A quick online search or visit to several stores can help consumers assess where they can find the best deals.

In Fiji, retailers often take advantage of the festive mood by luring customers with special "Diwali Offers" that may not always provide real value. For example, some stores might advertise discounts that seem substantial but they may have simply marked up the original prices before applying the discount. Therefore, it is important for consumers to look beyond flashy marketing and check the actual value of the product. Moreover, shopping at reputable stores with a clear return or refund policy is essential to ensure that consumers are protected in case the product is faulty or unsatisfactory.

Here are a few tips for comparative shopping:

- Visit multiple stores to compare prices.
- Check online platforms if available to see if there are better deals.
- Be wary of discounts that seem "too good to be true."
- Read reviews or seek recommendations from friends and family before purchasing high-value items like electronics, jewelry, or household appliances.

3. Create a Budget and Stick to It

Diwali shopping can quickly become overwhelming, especially with the plethora of choices available. It is easy to get caught up in the festive excitement and overspend on things you may not necessarily need. To avoid post-Diwali financial stress, creating a budget and sticking to it is essential.

Start by making a list of items you need to buy for the festival. Categorize these items based on their priority, such as groceries, clothing, gifts, decorations, and electronics. Estimate the cost of each category and allocate funds accordingly. Setting a strict budget will help prevent impulse purchases, which often lead to overspending.

It is also important to leave room in your budget for unexpected expenses that might crop up, especially during the last-minute rush. Whether it is the last-minute purchase of sweets or additional decorations, having a little extra budget can keep you financially stable throughout

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P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka
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the holiday season. By managing finances carefully, you can enjoy the festivities without the burden of overspending.

4. Be Cautious of Substandard or Counterfeit Products

Another concern during the festive season is the sale of substandard or counterfeit products. With many items flooding the market, from electronics to home décor and clothing, it is possible to come across products that do not meet safety standards or quality expectations. This is particularly true for imported goods that may not have undergone the necessary checks for compliance with Fijian safety regulations.

To avoid purchasing substandard goods, always check for product labels, warranties, and certification marks, especially for high-ticket items such as electrical appliances, electronics, and jewelry. Consumers should also be wary of products that do not provide clear information about the manufacturer, expiration date (for food items), or safety precautions. In addition, when buying food products like sweets and snacks, consumers should ensure that the items are properly packaged, hygienic, and within their expiration date.

If a deal looks too good to be true, it often is. For instance, some traders may offer highly discounted electronics, but these items may be defective or lack after-sales service support. Always opt for reliable brands and authorized sellers to ensure quality and after-sales support.

5. Understand Your Consumer Rights and Lodge a Complaint If Necessary

Consumers in Fiji have the right to expect that the goods they purchase are safe, durable, and as described. The Consumer Council of Fiji has taken great strides in ensuring that consumer rights are upheld, especially during high-traffic shopping periods like Diwali.

If you find that a product or service does not meet the expected standard, you can always lodge a complaint. Common issues that may warrant a complaint include:

- Receiving faulty or damaged goods.
- Misleading advertisements or hidden fees.
- Failure of traders to honor warranties or refund policies.
- Price gouging or unreasonable price increases.

The Council is equipped to assist consumers in resolving such issues, whether it involves refunds, exchanges, or more significant legal actions. It is essential to keep all receipts,

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invoices, and records of any transactions made, as these will serve as evidence should you need to escalate the matter.

6. Support Local Businesses

While comparative shopping is key to finding the best deals, the Diwali season also presents an excellent opportunity to support local businesses and traders. Many local entrepreneurs, artisans, and home-based businesses offer unique, high-quality items that are perfect for gifting or decorating your home during Diwali. From handmade sweets and snacks to traditional attire and jewelry, supporting local businesses helps stimulate the Fijian economy and encourages the growth of small enterprises.

Shopping from local businesses also ensures that consumers get more personalized services, which can often be lacking in large, commercial outlets. For instance, locally produced sweets may be fresher, made with more authentic ingredients, and come with customization options. Additionally, by buying locally, you contribute to reducing the carbon footprint associated with importing goods from abroad.

7. Practice Responsible Consumerism

In the spirit of Diwali, which signifies the victory of light over darkness, it is worth reflecting on how our shopping habits impact the environment. Fiji is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and as responsible consumers, we should consider how we can make more sustainable choices during this festive season.

Instead of purchasing single-use plastic items for decoration, consider opting for eco-friendly or reusable options. When buying clothing, look for materials that are sustainably sourced or produced. Additionally, when buying gifts, opt for meaningful and durable items rather than products that are trendy or likely to be discarded after a short period. By making environmentally conscious choices, consumers can contribute to a cleaner, greener Fiji.

Conclusion

As Diwali draws near, it is essential for consumers in Fiji to stay informed and exercise caution while navigating the bustling marketplace. By being mindful of price gouging, practicing comparative shopping, sticking to a budget, and understanding their rights, consumers can enjoy a stress-free and joyous festive season. Remember, the Consumer Council of Fiji is always available to assist with any concerns or complaints, ensuring that the spirit of Diwali

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@CCoFiji



Consumer Council of Fiji



www.consumersfiji.org



Mobile App

remains bright and positive for all. Consumers can also reach out through the National Consumer Helpline 155 if they require immediate assistance or guidance on resolving disputes.

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