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FEATURE ARTICLE

### **Your Guide to Buying Furniture: How to Invest Wisely**

Among the many purchases made during the end of the year period, furniture often ranks high on the list. New dining sets for feasts with the family, luxurious sofas for entertaining guests, or beds for visiting relatives—furniture shopping is booming during the holidays. However, while the allure of buying furniture at discounted prices may seem like the perfect deal, buyers must tread cautiously. Unseen pitfalls could turn their festive cheer into post-holiday regret.

This article explores common furniture-related issues faced by Fijian consumers, highlights dubious practices by some retailers, and provides actionable tips to ensure your holiday investment in furniture is a wise one.

#### **The Problem with Substandard Furniture**

Substandard furniture, whether imported or locally made, is primarily constructed from cheaper materials that fail to withstand the challenges posed by Fiji's humid climate. Common problems include warping of timber due to moisture exposure, mold growth on wood and fabric, weak structural integrity leading to breakage or deformation, and attraction of pests such as bedbugs and termites, particularly when inferior or untreated timber is used.

This is not the first time that such issues have been raised by consumers regarding imported furniture. While these issues are common in lower-cost imported furniture, local pieces are also susceptible if not made with quality materials. Many consumers have reported timber furniture developing mold or warping within weeks of purchase, only to find disclaimers hidden in fine print or on inconspicuous labels, absolving retailers of responsibility for such defects. These disclaimers typically state that the store is not liable for environmental damage to the timber, leaving buyers stuck with faulty products and no recourse for returns or refunds.

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In other instances, customers have noticed timber furniture bowing—a defect caused by poor-quality wood that warps under Fiji’s tropical conditions. Bowed wood not only ruins the aesthetic appeal of the furniture but also compromises its durability and safety. Despite these glaring issues, such furniture continues to be marketed aggressively during the festive season.

### **Case Study: A Family’s Ordeal with Moldy Furniture**

Consider the experience of the Singh family from Lautoka. Last Christmas, they purchased a dining table and chairs from a prominent retailer. Within a month, they noticed a foul smell emanating from the furniture, followed by the appearance of greenish mold on the wooden surfaces. Attempts to clean it proved futile, as the mold kept returning.

When the Singhs approached the retailer, they were met with disappointment. The retailer pointed to a disclaimer on the receipt that stated, “*Not liable for environmental damage to wood products.*” Left with no option, the family had to replace the furniture at an additional cost. Their ordeal underscores the importance of thoroughly inspecting and questioning retailers before making a purchase.

### **The Appeal of “Cheaper, Elegant, but Miner” Furniture**

The phrase “cheaper, elegant, but miner” encapsulates the dilemma faced by many Fijian consumers. Imported furniture often looks appealing and fits snugly within tight budgets. However, this attractiveness can be deceptive. Manufacturers use lower-grade timber and compromise on craftsmanship to produce these pieces at reduced costs. While the initial investment may seem like a bargain, the long-term expense of repairing or replacing these items far outweighs the savings.

Moreover, furniture made from substandard materials is ill-suited for Fiji’s climate. High humidity accelerates wear and tear, making such furniture a poor choice for the local

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environment. Yet, the festive discounts and eye-catching designs continue to lure buyers into making hasty decisions.

### Tips for Smart Furniture Shopping

To help consumers make informed decisions this Christmas, here are some practical tips:

1. **Check the Quality of Materials:** Ensure that the furniture is made from durable materials. Hardwood is a better option than particleboard or MDF (medium-density fiberboard), which are prone to damage in humid conditions.
2. **Inspect for Defects:** Carefully examine furniture for signs of warping, loose joints, or poor finishing. Look out for disclaimers that may limit your rights as a consumer.
3. **Ask About Warranties:** Always inquire about warranty policies. A reliable retailer should offer warranties that cover defects and damages.
4. **Research the Retailer:** Read reviews and seek recommendations from friends and family. Avoid retailers with a history of selling substandard products.
5. **Avoid Impulse Purchases:** Do not let festive discounts rush your decision. Take your time to compare products and assess their quality before buying.

### Consumer Rights and Protection

Fijian consumers have the right to expect quality products and fair treatment from retailers. The Consumer Council of Fiji has been actively addressing complaints related to defective furniture and urging retailers to adopt ethical practices. However, buyers must also play their part by being vigilant and well-informed.

Here are some steps you can take if you encounter issues:

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Consumer Council of Fiji



[www.consumersfiji.org](http://www.consumersfiji.org)



Mobile App

- **Report to Authorities:** File a complaint with the Consumer Council of Fiji if you believe you have been misled or sold defective products on our National Toll-free line 155.
- **Keep Documentation:** Retain all receipts, warranty cards, and product descriptions as evidence in case of disputes.
- **Know Your Rights:** Familiarize yourself with the Sale of Goods Act, which provides protection against defective products.

This Christmas, let us focus on making thoughtful purchases that bring lasting value to our homes. While it is easy to get swept up in the festive spirit, a little caution can go a long way in avoiding costly mistakes. By choosing quality over convenience and supporting ethical retailers, Fijian consumers can celebrate the season with peace of mind and beautiful, durable furniture that stands the test of time.

As you prepare for the holidays, remember that an informed buyer is a protected buyer. Stay vigilant, ask the right questions, and ensure your Christmas investment in furniture is one that you will cherish for years to come

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