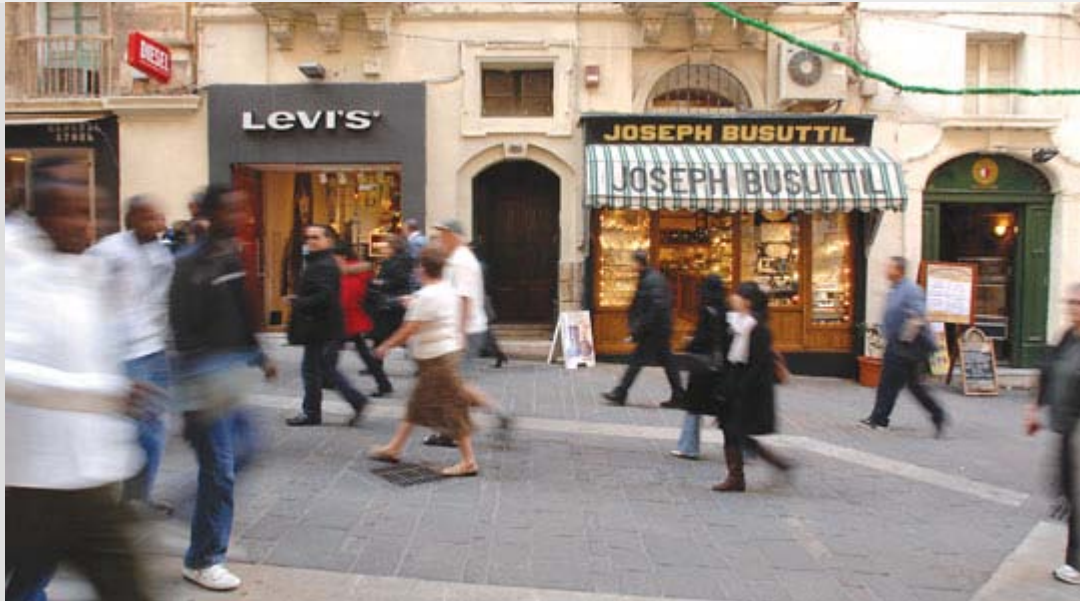


## Retailers hope for a happy Christmas

Matthew Xuereb



Retailers are keeping their fingers crossed for a good shopping season as the recession continues to push consumers to exercise caution.

There is little sign of Christmas shopping yet but retailers hope that today's public holiday, when outlets in the main centres will be open, will serve as the usual spark for the traditional spending spree.

Many shop owners have pinned their hopes on consumers shedding some of their reluctance to spend as the Christmas cheer sets in. But in the light of the uncertainty caused by the still-to-be-announced increase in the utility tariffs, pessimism prevails.

"The way business fares on Tuesday (today) will be an indication of what retailers are to expect of this year's shopping season," Chamber for Small and Medium Enterprises director general Vince Farrugia said.

But he does not expect business to improve much over last year's Christmas season because recessionary times are not yet over.

To make matters worse, he said, not only were people being cautious with their disposable income but the government had just done a "bad PR exercise" related to the new water and electricity rates.

"This exercise will be used by PR schools to show students how not to do things," he said.

"We are still expecting people to spend but they will probably spend less because, if we just take the utility tariffs, we do not know what is coming our way."

Mr Farrugia urged businesses to be creative and organise something special to attract shoppers. This, he thinks, would do the trick.

The chamber, he added, was pleased with the opening of the revamped St George's Square and the week of activities there would attract more people to Valletta.

The chamber was also working on securing two days of free bus rides and the suspension of the controlled access to Valletta for a couple of days prior to Christmas.

Sliema shop owners say business so far is slow, as it has been for several months, but they too are hoping it will pick up starting from today.

## Comments

Catherine Borg (3 hours, 30 minutes ago)

L-istorja tispjega ruhha hekk : 1. Bis-sahha tal- PN mil-1987 'l hawn f'Malta sirt issib kollox. Hadd ma ghadu jmur Catania biex jixtri xi oggett partikulari ghax f' Malta ma hawnx jew ghax ma' jithallix jidhol. 2. Bis-sahha tar-retailers il-Maltin regghu bdew imorru Catania etc etc ghax jidrilhom li ghandhom isiru sinjuri f'temp qasir. Illum ma' tantx baqa' boloh. Hwienet hawn kemm trid, tista' issiefer bi ftit euro, tista' tuza l-Internet. Dak li f'Tas-Sliema rajtu immarkat 99 euro, xtrajtu minn Venezia l-bierah 65 euro. U sadattant it-Taljani xorta jgergru li l-hajja tagghom hija gholja. Inkredibbli !

N.Calleja (3 hours, 36 minutes ago)

I agree one hundred per cent with Christopher Galea and J. Farrugia. These business people are never satisfied and are always searching to enhance their intake. Nothing wrong with that but the fact that they are never happy and always moaning about slow sales puts you off. Because of the great progress Malta has made, each and every town and village has its own business centre so people need not go to Valletta or Sliema like the good old days.

Christopher Galea (4 hours, 34 minutes ago)

One thing really baffles me. Why do such related reports/interviews always concern businesses in Valletta and/or Sliema? Valletta retailers complaining that business is low? Have they ever considered the fact that in this day and age Maltese people do not go to Valletta to shop any more? Reason being: there are more commercial centers in other towns around Malta. Why should one bother going to Valletta when what one needs is available in the area one lives in. And believe you me, there are quite a couple of 'local' outlets which make shopping a pleasure!

J Farrugia (6 hours, 29 minutes ago)

these business are always the same year in year out. They grumble that business is sick, when Christmas arrives they hope for a good Christmas and when Christmas and new year passes, they grumble just the same. No business. Good if there is no business, it is all their fault. They do this just like their Italian counterparts to keep off the tax man. We have learnt this trick throughout the years. Always lamenting. Nothing changes. Be of good cheer says santa.

joseph saliba (7 hours, 13 minutes ago)

The two-day free bus ride is a splendid idea. The new water and electricity bills can be countered by price slashing. A 'bad' thing against a good thing. And that way consumers will flood.

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