

BARGAINS GALORE

FROM PAGE E1

counts, in addition to the sales that precede Chinese New Year and Christmas, Singapore's two other prime retail seasons.

Moreover, the GSS is the one period when consumers can expect markdowns across multiple product categories all at the same time.

"The GSS presents a value proposition," says Mr Andrew Phua, director of tourism shopping and dining at the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), which supports the GSS.

"It is an island-wide sale that offers discounts on a wide range of product categories, including fashion, lifestyle products and electronic gadgets."

In comparison, the sales tied to the aforementioned festive seasons cater more to shoppers who are on the lookout for specific products for the holidays, retailers observe.

"The Christmas season is a gifting season, so we see a lot of customers spending on toys, homeware, followed by fashion and accessories. For the CNY period, many people focus on dressing up the homes," says a Robinsons spokesman.

Items from these specific product categories do not typically come with deep discounts, as Christmas and CNY are times when retailers bring in new, season-centric merchandise sold at full price, SRA's Ms Lau explains. Sales tied to these two festive seasons typically account for 20 per cent to 25 per cent of retailers' annual sales turnover, she says.

"The GSS is when retailers mark down their goods to move old stock and to prepare for the arrival of fresh inventory. So merchandise is sold at heavy discounts of up to 70 per cent and even at prices that are below cost," says Ms Lau.

Discounts for this year's GSS are expected to be similar to last year's. Typically, retailers start with discounts of about 30 per cent and slash prices further as the sale season progresses.

New malls add buzz

IN ADDITION to deep discounts, this year's GSS will see Orchard Road's four new malls - Ion Orchard, Orchard Central, 313@Somerset and Mandarin Gallery - joining the retail frenzy for the first time.

With over 1.8 million sq ft of new shopping space, Mr Steven Goh, the secretariat spokesman of the Orchard Road Business Association (Orba), predicts that shoppers will be "spoilt for choice".

On top of discounts offered by individual retail tenants, these malls are dangling various incentives to entice shoppers to part with their dollars on their premises.

For example, for the duration of the GSS, Ion Orchard will give \$10 vouchers to the first 50 shoppers who spend \$120 every day.

At Orchard Central, shoppers who spend \$50 can redeem a voucher pack worth \$50 throughout the GSS, while stocks last.

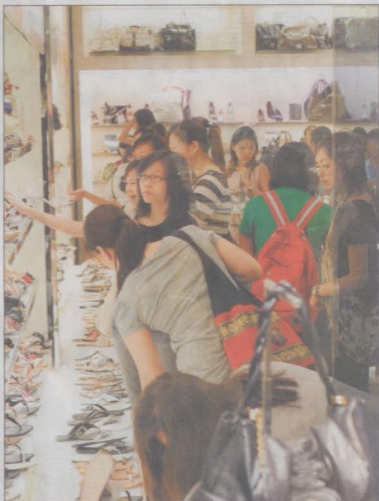
Mandarin Gallery is also organising a Great Night Sale next Friday from 9pm till midnight.

"Taking part in an established island-wide event like the GSS is a good way to brand Mandarin Gallery as a great shopping destination," says Mrs Patricia Tan, senior vice-president of retail, marketing and leasing at Overseas Union Enterprise, which runs the mall.

"Sales create attention and entice shoppers to take notice of us as one of the new malls along Orchard Road."

The GSS also follows hard on the heels of a slew of recent events created to build up interest in Singapore's fashion and retail scene.

Both the



A store in Wisma Atria packed with bargain-hunters during last year's Great Singapore Sale. Discounts for this year's sale are expected to be similar to last year's. ST FILE PHOTO

Asia Fashion Exchange (a series of fashion shows, trade events and conferences) and Fashion Season@Orchard (a series of fashion events, workshops and parties to celebrate Orchard Road), were launched last month.

The aim of organising multiple events is to "add vibrancy and buzz to the precincts including Orchard Road and Marina Bay", says Mr Phua of the STB.

Wooing the tourist dollar

THE GSS is also viewed as a key opportunity for malls to draw tourists in, and the prospects for raking in tourist dollars look bright this year.

Tourist arrivals have logged record highs for five months in a row, with 938,000 foreigners on Singapore's shores last month, a 20.4 per cent jump over April last year.

Says a spokesman for Ion Orchard: "The GSS also coincides with the school holidays in several regional markets, one of the key tourist seasons according to the STB, giving us a great opportunity to showcase Ion Orchard to a broader regional audience."

An estimated 30 per cent to 40 per cent of shoppers at Paragon year-round are tourists and they generally tend to spend more compared to local shoppers, says a spokesman for the mall, making them a sought-after group of consumers.

STB's Mr Phua says: "Despite last year being an exceptionally challenging one, the tourism industry weathered it credibly. Shopping remains a key pillar in the tourism industry here."

According to MasterCard figures, tour-

ists spent US\$248.5 million at last year's GSS, a slight increase compared to 2008's spending of \$248.4 million.

The top five markets in terms of tourist spending last year at the GSS were the United States, Australia, Britain, Malaysia and Japan.

For last year's GSS, tourists shopped mainly at duty-free and department stores and also patronised health and beauty spas. The product categories they spent the most on included electronics, jewellery and watches.

Tourist dollars may be even more important this year as some fear Singaporeans have been exposed to so many recession-triggered sales over the past year that they will not be much interested in even the mother of all sales.

But others have faith that Singaporeans will continue indulging in bargain-hunting - a favourite national sport.

Dr Lynda Wee, chief executive of retail consultancy firm Bootstrap, says: "Singaporeans love to load up on good bargains, so I don't believe sale fatigue applies here."

"The international economic situation remains volatile, so value-driven buys will continue to be attractive to Singaporeans."

Senior public relations executive Fiona Huang agrees. "The good thing about the GSS is that almost every store will offer discounts, so there is plenty of treasure-hunting to do."

So, to borrow an oft-used slogan, all signs point to the GSS as the sale worth waiting for.

On your marks, get set, shop. karentee@sph.com.sg

"Sales allow us to discover great deals and we love to load up on good bargains. See the extent of shopping we do even on vacation. Sales fatigue? It doesn't apply to Singaporeans."

Dr Lynda Wee, chief executive officer of retail consultancy firm Bootstrap

SHOPTALK

Diane Tay, 20
Retail assistant

Top three things to buy during GSS:

- Cropped tops
- Sundresses and maxi dresses
- High-waisted jeans, skirts and shorts

"Sundresses are suitable for the hot weather now and they are extremely versatile. I'm expecting to attend some Christmas parties at the end of the year as well, so I will be shopping in advance for some simple and elegant maxi dresses. And I like the vintage look, so I'm hoping to get some high-waisted jeans, skirts and shorts."

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