

# The sight, sound and smell of Aidilfitri bazaars

Jalan TAR has been the go-to for most city dwellers for decades

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AS AIDILFITRI approaches, Malaysia transforms into a colourful blend of tradition and modernity.

From vibrant streets to lively bazaars, *The Malaysian Reserve (TMR)* explored how Malaysians are preparing for the celebrations amid the current economic landscape.

Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (Jalan TAR) in the heart of Kuala Lumpur (KL) has been the go-to for most city dwellers for decades.

Stalls adorned with colourful lights and banners beckoning passersby, offering a kaleidoscope of goods ranging from traditional Malay garments to intricate decorations for the forthcoming festivities.

Despite the efforts to tempt customers, Aidilfitri outfit seller Muhammad Abdul Rahman told *TMR* that his 10-year-old business located at Arked Jalan Bunus 6, is currently marred by the lack of consumer power this year, impacting his sales target.

"Back then, each family member would carry two to three shopping bags but now, the same number of bags are for the entire family," he said.

Although there is an apparent crowd of shoppers, he said consumers are being careful with their spending.

Comparing sales in the second week of Ramadhan to the same period last year, Muhammad said sales were down 60%.

He added that KL City Hall's (DBKL) placement of the bazaar booths blocks the view of his store.

He suggested that DBKL strategise better next year in selecting locations to ensure all businesses have equal opportunities.

Regarding online shopping, Muhammad said despite the growing trend, many people still prefer to buy Aidilfitri clothes in person. This way, they can feel the fabric, ensure the right size and potentially bargain with the sellers.

In the crowd, Bruneian tourist Afiqah Matjarini, 33, said it is a tradition to do her Aidilfitri shopping at Jalan TAR.

She observed a bigger crowd this year as people more confident to go out after the pandemic.

In terms of pricing, she noted that some items are more expensive compared to last year, but she is okay with it, understanding the increased costs in raw materials and logistics.

"The budget for Aidilfitri preparations this year is RM3,000 to RM4,000 for my family of four," she told *TMR*.

Meanwhile at MyTown Shopping Centre in Cheras, a banker who introduced herself as Jang Adnan shared that her family started preparing for Aidilfitri early before clothes in their sizes ran out of stock.

However, she observed that crowds in various areas around Kuala Lumpur, including MyTown Cheras, have diminished.

She attributed this to the trend of Aidilfitri sales campaigns on e-commerce platforms.

Despite her preference for in-person shopping, she noted that many of her friends, including her daughters, now favour online shopping through platforms such as Lazada, TikTok Shop and Shopee.

"Although online shopping entails the risks of receiving the wrong size, colour, defects, or unsatisfactory fabrics, I do understand its appeal to people with busy schedules," she added. Regarding expenses, she mentioned that her



Pics by Shauqi Wahab & Hidayath Hisham

**Che Ku Zaiton maintains a consistent pricing range for her Aidilfitri products this year**



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family had to reduce some costs to cope with the current price increases in raw materials, taxes and the depreciation of the ringgit.

"Before this, each of us will have two to three sets of clothes, but now one is enough," she said.

*TMR* also took a look at the Ramadhan bazaar at Dataran Putrajaya, where after an iftar picnic on the field, the crowd thronged the nearby bazaar to purchase Aidilfitri clothes and cookies.

Hanif Hashim, a Bulan Bintang clothing seller said there is a bigger crowd compared to last year, attributing it to better organisation, location and people's reduced perceptions towards Covid-19.

This has led to his business making more sales halfway through Ramadhan.

Hanif prepared his booth a month in advance, without much decorations because Bulan Bintang had already done the marketing part.

This year, he noticed that the brick orange colour is the trend and choice among most Malays for the season.

He also noted that while online shopping is becoming increasingly popular, in-person shopping will not disappear, especially for Aidilfitri preparations, as people still crave the festive atmosphere.

Meanwhile, all the way in Kuantan, Pahang, the smell of freshly baked cookies fills the air at the Taman Kerang Raya Bazaar.

The aroma of *semperit*, pineapple tarts, *kuih bangkit*, honey cornflakes and other favourites mingle with the sounds of lively chatter, laughter and the melodic calls to prayer from the iconic Masjid Biru.

Despite the slower foot traffic during the first half of Ramadhan, seller Che Ku Zaiton Che Ku Hitam, 67, remained optimistic about her sales, thanks to her loyal customer base that was built over more than a decade of selling homemade cookies.

"This year, it is quite the same as previous seasons. People would drop by our booth right after breaking fast on the field in front of Masjid Biru," Che Ku Zaiton told *TMR*.

Traditional cookies such as pineapple tarts and *biskut makmur* continue to be the cornerstone of her offerings, but she has also introduced modern twists to cater to evolving tastes.

"Among the popular modern variations are *Cadbury tarts* and *matcha almond London*, something that I was quite afraid to produce and put on offer but surprisingly have garnered quite a following among both young and old customers this year," she added.

She has maintained a consistent pricing range for her Aidilfitri products this year, refusing to engage in the last-minute price slashing that most vendors resort to.

To cater to her customers' needs, Che Ku Zaiton has several strategies in place.

While last-minute bargains are common at the bazaar, her loyal customers prioritise quality over discounts.

"Customers in Kuantan are quite accustomed to last-minute bargains offered by sellers on the eve of Aidilfitri, and who can blame them as prices are slashed by more than half.

"Although I do still get some people haggling over prices, I usually decline and explain my prices. Also, I offer tasting samples

of my homemade cookies, allowing customers to experience the superior quality and flavour firsthand," she said.

To create a festive atmosphere, her stall features vibrant decorations that complement the spirit of the occasion.

The personal touches she added to her stall and products have not gone unnoticed by her customers.

In an age where online shopping has become increasingly popular, her success highlights the enduring appeal of traditional shopping experiences, especially during festive periods.

"Despite the convenience of online shopping, many customers still prefer the experience of physically visiting the Aidilfitri bazaars.

"For them, it is not just about purchasing Aidilfitri items; it is about upholding traditions, supporting local businesses, and experiencing the vibrant atmosphere of the bazaars firsthand," she said, emphasising that certain aspects of the festive shopping experience cannot be replicated online.

For Che Ku Zaiton and her loyal customers, the bazaar is not just a place to purchase festive goods but also a cherished tradition that brings the community together.

Meanwhile, a few stalls down, savvy sellers at Ramadhan bazaars are adapting their offerings and pricing strategies to cater to evolving customer preferences.

Zuliyana Aziz, 49, noticed a surge in early shoppers seeking quality products at good value.

While traditional treats remained popular, she has curated unique artisanal offerings to meet growing demand, such as recipes on TikTok.

As a savvy and observant reseller, she understood the importance of pricing in attracting customers and driving sales.

"That is why I have forged partnerships with reputable suppliers who offer high-quality products at competitive prices," she said.

Despite economic headwinds, Zuliyana remained optimistic driven by early customer interest by staying attuned to market trends and customer preferences.

Adapting pricing strategies to consumer behaviour shifts has been crucial, so she said that adaptability is the key.

"By offering a diverse range of products at different price points, I ensure that there is something for everyone, regardless of budget or preference," she added.

Besides competitive prices, she implemented targeted promotions, such as buy one free one or bundle deals to incentivise purchases and attract customers to her stall.

Zuliyana has focused on curating personalised experiences aligned with customer tastes.

"This year, customers are also gravitating towards curated and personalised shopping experiences that cater to their individual preferences," she said.

She focused on creating an inviting and immersive shopping environment that is crucial to capturing the attention and interest of customers via thoughtful customer service, eye-catching displays and engaging signage.

Because of that, the lure of traditional experiences wins over e-commerce.

"While online shopping offers convenience, the allure of the Aidilfitri Bazaar lies in its vibrant atmosphere and the opportunity for customers to discover new and exciting products firsthand," she said.

Among the many visitors eagerly embracing this festive tradition of visiting the bazaar is Nor Aina Aqilah Muhammad, a 26-year-old resident who shared her family's preparations and experiences.

"Our family is really getting into the Aidilfitri spirit this year where we have started our preparations early to avoid the chaotic history of Aidilfitri 2022," Aina told *TMR*.

With great enthusiasm, she and her loved ones have immersed themselves in the festivities, meticulously cleaning and decorating their home with colourful decorations and chasing lights, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere that radiates the spirit of the season.

Although she enjoyed her family's shopping adventures, Aina also shops for new Aidilfitri outfits online.

Sharing that red is the family's theme this year, she said the selection of the perfect outfits is a cherished tradition, symbolising renewal and unity within the family. Sharing her enthusiasm for the bazaar, Aina noted the variety of things available such as traditional Aidilfitri cookies such as *kuih makmur*, *semperit*, and *Nestum cookies*, which are always a hit.

Addressing a common concern among shoppers, Aina reassured them that the prices at the bazaar are quite reasonable.

"My family and I noticed that stalls offering unique and innovative Aidilfitri treats are particularly popular, as people are eager to try something new and different," she said.

Reflecting on the experience of shopping at the Ramadhan Bazaar versus the convenience of online shopping, she highlighted the unique charm of the former.

"As a family, we love the sensory experience of being able to see, touch and even taste the products before making a purchase. There is also a sense of community and camaraderie at the bazaar," she said.