

'Tis the season for mall tours



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METRO NEWS

Wednesday, 10 Dec 2025



A Shangri-La Rasa Sayang, Penang staff member hanging candy canes on one of their Christmas trees, as Chu Chu the Train chugs merrily around it. — Photos: CHAN BOON KAI, LIM BENG TATT and JEREMY TAN/The Star



DECEMBER may not bring snow to Penang, but it offers the next best thing – magical wonderlands in shopping malls, hotels and resorts.

With frosted conifers, glistening ornaments, adorable characters and more, retail spaces are transformed into festive escapes full of holiday cheer.



The displays grow more imaginative each year, with immersive themes that not only capture the imaginations of visitors young and old, but also afford photo opportunities at every corner.

And with Christmas carols ringing through the air, ordinary outings turn into memorable celebrations. StarMetro visited some of the most enchanting ones in the northern region.



Eastern and Oriental staff member Ananth (right) and guest service assistant Ziyad Razin touching up the hotel's classic red and gold Christmas tree.



It's a cozy Christmas

In Penang, visitors will find a whimsical world of sweetness through Sunway Carnival Mall's "Cozy Cozy Christmas" display.



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The unconventional Christmas tree is a 9m-high stack of fluffy green baubles dusted with snow and capped with a golden star.

Around it are magical trails lined with more fuzzy sights – oversized red gift boxes, pink and purple baubles, a colourful bridge, twinkling lights and giant candy canes.

One of the candy canes is actually Twixy, the realm's mischievous yet sweet guardian. It is one of eight festive mascots created by the many Sunway malls in Malaysia for the festive season.

Sunway Carnival Mall senior general manager Chai Wen Yew said the aim was to create a fun little escape with playful surprises at every corner.

"Twixy reminds us of something we often forget as adults – that the childlike wonder in us never really disappears.

"Sometimes, all it really needs is a setting like this to come alive again. So come and enjoy the sweet, candy-like charm of the season," he added.



Sunshine Central's "A Merry Berry Christmas" festive backdrop has a record-setting 10,000 teddy bears, including a giant teddy balloon above.

Breaking pinatas

The spirit of fiesta takes over celebrations at Queensbay Mall with a "Happy Pinata Holidays" theme inspired by the Mexican Christmas festivity of Las Posadas.

It is traditionally a time when families gather for candlelit processions, carol singing, feasting and breaking pinatas, that are decorative papier-mache containers, filled with candies or toys.

These also symbolise hope and happiness, and take the form of Santa, his reindeer and multi-pointed stars.

Giant bauble-shaped arches frame the entryway and stage, above which floats a ruffled Christmas tree. Dancing cactus and glossy ribbons add movement to the scene.

For centre manager Sylvester Soh, every festive season is an opportunity to outdo the last and create scenes that could be the talk of town.

"This year, we drew inspiration from Mexico, a place you wouldn't immediately associate with the season, but whose celebrations overflow with joy, colour and community spirit.

"It's a fresh and vibrant twist to Christmas, which we hope shoppers of all ages would enjoy."



1st Avenue Penang's "A Merry Little Christmas Town" gives shoppers a Nordic taste of the holidays.

Bears on festive journey



Get ready to fall head over “paws” for the cuddly and adorable stars of Gurney Plaza mall’s “Bear-y Bright Holidays” festive scene.

A 4m-tall white snow bear reclines over the stage, while a 3m-tall red counterpart surveys the land. Dozens of smaller bears laze around a 10m-high tower.

Another teddy can be spotted at the wheel of a truck, ready to take its fuzzy family on a Christmas journey. Others sit atop benches and gift boxes, beckoning shoppers to join them for photos.

Bear-lined conifers, wandering reindeer, illuminated archways and cascading garlands complete the cutesy decorations.

CapitaLand Investment Malaysia northern region general manager Peter Chan said teddy bears were the perfect mascots as they are loved by many.

“One of the most eagerly anticipated aspects of festive seasons in Malaysia are the decorations put up by shopping malls.

“Tourists frequently remark how establishments like ours go all out to create a joyful ambience, which often eclipses what they see back home.

“More than just beautiful sights, it also drives retail spending that benefits the nation’s economy,” said Chan.



Shoppers at Aman Central truly living the “Euphoria Christmas” spirit during a snowfall session.

Holiday wonderlands



Sunshine Central's "A Merry Berry Christmas" festive village is equally charming, with 10,000 plushies spread across towering Christmas trees, cottages, gift boxes and a snow globe.

Capped off with a giant bear balloon, it earned a listing in the Malaysia Book of Records for "The Most Teddy Bears Displayed in a Christmas Event".

An accompanying "A Bear for Care" charity programme also allows visitors to adopt a bear with a donation. All proceeds will be channelled to welfare homes for children.



Shoppers taking photos with the large candy canes, fuzzy Christmas trees and fluffy baubles that are part of Sunway Carnival Mall's magical "Cozy Cozy Christmas" holiday realm.

Sunshine Group marketing communications senior manager Bryan Wong said this reflected the company's long-standing commitment to give back to society.

"We aim to inspire a community-wide movement of compassion and kindness. That way, festive celebrations can spark meaningful action across Penang," he said.

While you are exploring the village, remember to check out the bear tunnel, cuckoo clock tower, giant festive TV box and Christmas bear train as well.

At Gurney Paragon Mall, the festive finery takes a decidedly modern twist with the "Christmas Reimagined" display centred around a 10m-high tree in gold and champagne tones.

A curved stairway allows visitors to get up close and pose with illuminated reindeer. For little ones, the descent is much more fun through a mini slide.



Surrounding that are many smaller trees in stunning pinks and reds, including one ringed by a rotating carousel of horses.

Hunza Group executive director Khor Tze Ming said it was rooted in a desire to bring visitors back to the essence of the season. It invites one to pause and reimagine what Christmas meant to them.

“Our vision here extends beyond retail. We aim to be a community hub where families and friends come together to celebrate moments that matter.

“The holiday season gives us meaningful opportunities to inspire togetherness and create lasting memories,” she added.

For a taste of celebrations in the Arctic circle, visit 1st Avenue Penang which has put up a Nordic-inspired “A Merry Little Christmas Town”.

Charming wooden cabins surround a poinsettia fountain, with whitewashed cobblestone and timber creating a snowy aura.

Standing tall at one end is a 9m-high frosted Christmas tree bedecked in gold and silver baubles. Alongside it, an open carriage pulled by reindeer allows visitors to pose for shots.



Cute bears will steal the hearts of many at Gurney Plaza’s “Bear-y Bright Holidays” display.

Charm of winter

A joyful festive village has popped up at Aman Central mall in Alor Setar, Kedah, for its “Euphoria Christmas” celebrations.

Mini snow-capped cottages and windmill towers lead shoppers to the main square featuring a Christmas tree and a snowman’s house.

Off to the side is a towering gift box installation flanked by a pair of illuminated archways. Supersized snowflakes, some on the ground and others high above, add wintry charm.

Mall assistant general manager (marketing communications) Ken Chin said they constantly sought to elevate the shopping experience for everyone.

“This year’s theme represents more than just the euphoria of the holidays. It symbolises our mall’s journey of growth, resilience and community connection over the past 10 years,” he added.



Penang Marriott Hotel staff showing the “Wonderful Buddies” plush keychain Christmas characters (from left) Chendie, Pillo, Chef Coco and Duri.

Spreading joy to travellers

Penang hotels and resorts are similarly aglow, with public spaces adorned with all the trimmings of the season.

Shangri-La Rasa Sayang, Penang’s enchanting “Nature in Wonderland” decorations were inspired by its lush tropical gardens and unique architecture.

Guests will find jolly snowmen and reindeer standing among Christmas trees at the lobby. This leads to a festive goodies counter, where Chu Chu the Train chugs merrily away.

Communications director Datuk Suleiman Tunku Abdul Rahman said they wanted to draw a link between nature and festivity.

“Many elements of the decor were handcrafted using natural materials. This reflects our tropical surroundings and grounds the celebration in Malaysian warmth.”



Shimmering golden trees and red conifers anchor Gurney Paragon Mall's eye-catching "Christmas Reimagined" setup.

Eastern and Oriental (E&O) Hotel's cherished 6m-tall Christmas tree has returned in traditional shades of red and gold, along with matching gift boxes.

General manager Alison Fraser said this year's celebration was especially meaningful as the hotel recently marked its 140th anniversary.

"Christmas at the E&O has always been a time of joy, gratitude and togetherness. It is a heartfelt reminder of how far we've come and a celebration of the bright year ahead," she said.

Penang Marriott Hotel creatively combined local stories with charity by launching a "Wonderful Buddies" plush key chain blind box collection.

Each box contains one of four characters – Duri, Chendie, Pillo or Chef Coco – with a significant portion of proceeds going to the Children's Protection Society Malaysia.

Property general manager Adrian Chua said they hoped to raise at least RM50,000 for the non-governmental organisation that provides shelter and care for underprivileged children.

"Christmas has always been a time of giving so what better occasion to make a difference in the lives of kids who need it most.

"By creating something uniquely Penang, we can highlight the island's charm in a fun way," Chua said of the characters that were based on things like durian and cendol.



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