

The Virgin Islands Consortium

On St. Croix, The Slowest Black Friday Ever, Residents Say

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ST. CROIX -- Black Friday activity continued its decline here, as multiple stores that would normally be overtaken with residents rushing to collect early sale items, were either closed or saw the slowest participation they've ever recorded. Above, residents gather at Kmart West just before 5:00 a.m. this morning.

Radio Shack, whose doors were opened at 5:00 a.m. with a [short line of residents waiting to enter](#) in 2014, was closed. Office Depot (formerly Office Max), one of the busiest stores last year, had no one near its doors at 5:10 a.m., and Home Depot, opened early last year, was shuttered as of 5:00 a.m. today, its parking lot empty. An employee of Marianne's in Sunny Isle told the publication that it was the slowest on

record for the store; a sentiment that was echoed by a Kmart employee, who has worked at the retailer for 15 years, and by multiple residents who claim to be veteran Black Friday deal hunters.

Some residents, who asked not to be identified, said they remembered having to guard their shopping carts back in the day, as people would attempt to steal items from other shoppers' carts. "This was happening two years ago," one of three bargain seekers said.

The mood of many shoppers have changed drastically here, and perhaps the condition of their wallets, too. An economy once bolstered by the refinery on the island's south shore, has been replaced with empty spaces in its busiest shopping centers, an exodus of its middle class to the U.S. mainland, and the incessant brain drain that sees the brightest minds moving away in search of opportunities elsewhere, according to [data provided by the government](#).

"Ever since the refinery closed in 2012, it's been like this," one longtime employee, part of the maintenance team in Sunny Isle, told The Consortium last year. "I remember when the parking lot would be filled with cars, and the walkways would barely have space to walk. All you would see was the heads of people, and when it all settled, you would be able to pick up money on the floor, because some people would drink, get merry and waste money out here."

Today, the assessment stood to be even worse. The parking lots contained less cars than last year, and electronic devices that would have normally been hurriedly grabbed by deal seekers were stacked upon each other in Kmart East.

"I've been coming here for 10 years, and this is the worst I've seen it," another shopper, casually scanning sale items in Kmart East, told The Consortium this morning. "There seems to be an ongoing decline. It's like a normal day here," she said.