

Filipino's poor childhood inspires 500,000-light display

By Aaron Favila
The Associated Press

CAINTA, The Philippines — As a child from a poor family, Alexander Cruz marvelled at the big houses adorned with Christmas lights near his Philippine neighborhood, but the gates were always closed.

Now a successful businessman with a huge house in a hilly town south of Manila, Cruz celebrates Christmas in even more spectacular style. About half a million colorful lights cover every inch of his home: the roof, ceiling, walls, fence, doors, canopies, windows, and even the trees. And he and his wife open the gates to everyone.

"We're doing this to share our blessings, to give or share the spirit of Christmas to the people who [visit] our place," the 55-year-old Cruz said in an interview.

His home in Cainta has dazzled people far beyond the quiet town of about 290,000 people. Television networks have documented his holiday wonderland, which has become the backdrop for countless selfies.

"It brings back childhood feelings of Christmas, like in the movies, that you see



big houses with big lights," said Ella Cosme, a 34-year-old software programmer. "You feel like a child."

The lighting is designed by Cruz's wife, Aida, and preparations for the display start as early as August. Alexander Cruz estimates they used 5,000 boxes of LED lights, with each box containing a hundred

bulbs.

The Christmas lighting extravaganza is crowned by four brightly lit Christmas trees atop the roof. Inside the house and within its gardens are nativity scenes, a centerpiece in many homes in the Philippines. The country is a bastion of Christianity in Asia, and many Filipinos

SHINING SUBDIVISION. Visitors walk around the compound of a house lit by thousands of lights in Cainta, Rizal province, the Philippines. The house display draws huge crowds, especially during weekends, with visitors using the bright lights and festive Christmas decor as a backdrop for selfies with family and friends. (AP Photos/Aaron Favila)

prepare for Christmas by going to mass before dawn every day for nine days before December 25.

The Cruzes have gone all-out for Christmas for the past five years. Alexander Cruz said this year might be the last, since his neighbors are inconvenienced by the crowds. But with many residents and visitors urging him to carry on the tradition, he said he may reconsider.

"We're embarrassed that the subdivision is losing its privacy because of the number of people coming to see the house," Cruz said, but he added some of his neighbors may have gotten used to the upbeat holiday crowds that reach 500 to 1,000 people daily on weekends.

"They were the ones who said not to stop it, especially our mayor, who said there has been a good effect," Cruz said. "At least there is good news in Cainta."

AP writer Teresa Cerajano contributed to this report.

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