



# Shopping abroad



What's worth buying if you are travelling abroad this Christmas – and what's not

**B**efore the value of the pound crashed, booze cruises to France (and even shopping trips to New York if you wanted to push the boat out) were touted as a great way to shop and save. Post credit crunch, things look rather different. Sterling has fallen by 20% against the US dollar from a high of more than \$2 to the pound in July 2008, and it has dropped 15% against the euro over the same period. So is it still worth shopping overseas if you are going abroad this Christmas – or are you better off shopping at home?

## Comparing prices

We compared prices of a basket of luxury items at stores such as Macy's and Bloomingdale's in New York and Galeries Lafayette in Paris, against their prices in UK stores such as John Lewis.

Having established local prices, we converted these to sterling, using Bank of England exchange rates on 21 October 2009, with £1 worth US\$1.662, HK\$12.882 and 1.108 euros.

## It it worth it?

We found there were some significant savings to be made if you know what to buy. In Hong Kong we found Apple's iPod Classic was £42 cheaper than it was in the UK. And in the US, the Best Buy Canon EOS 450D DSLR camera was £118 cheaper. Eau de parfum was also cheaper in New York than London (£48 rather than £60 for Yves St Laurent Opium). Other New York bargains included Ugg Boots for £108 compared with £190 in the UK, and Ray-Ban sunglasses at £84

rather than the UK's £120. Macy's offers a Welcome International Savings Pass, which gives a further 10% off all items except cosmetics and fragrances. For more details see [www.macys.com](http://www.macys.com).

If you are going to France over the festive season, bargains will be harder to find. Champagne, predictably, was cheaper in France, but iPods, a Canon camera and Tommy Hilfiger jeans were all cheaper in the UK.

If you fancy a Gucci watch, you're definitely better off buying one at home – the UK price on the model we checked was more than £200 cheaper than in France, and £165 less than in the US.

## WHICH.CO.UK

**Which credit cards are best for overseas shopping?**

[www.which.co.uk/ccabroad](http://www.which.co.uk/ccabroad)

## Credit card protection

If you use a credit card, remember to factor in exchange fees and transaction charges. Our Best Buys (see [www.which.co.uk/money](http://www.which.co.uk/money)) are the cheapest. Using a credit card is worthwhile for major purchases (from £100.01 to £30,000) as this gives you protection under section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act – if the goods are faulty you can make a claim against your card provider. For more details see [www.which.co.uk/creditcardrights](http://www.which.co.uk/creditcardrights).

Section 75 also applies if you buy from foreign websites. If these are within the EU, there's also a cooling-off period on many items, in case you change your mind.

## Anything to declare?

If you buy goods abroad in person, there are limits on the amounts you can bring into the UK without paying additional duty and tax.

You can bring back an unlimited amount of most products from the 27 EU countries. From countries outside the EU the limit is now £340 for goods other than alcohol or tobacco.

This is the total value of all the goods you bring back, rather than of individual items. If you exceed your allowance you are liable to pay duty and tax on the full value

of goods, not just the extra amount. Import duty is levied at a flat 2.5% up to £553, but above that the rate varies.

On watches, for example, it is 4.5%, on clothing it's 12% and on DVD players 14%.

VAT is added on top of duty (currently 15%, due to revert to 17.5% on 1 January 2010). You don't pay VAT on books and children's clothes.

## Buying online

If you order goods online within Europe, there is no duty to pay but you may still be liable for VAT.

From non-EU countries the duty-free limit is now £120, but VAT is charged on items worth more than £18 (£36 if sent as a gift). Tax and duty is collected by the Post Office, which adds a charge of £8.



## RAY-BAN SUNGLASSES

UK	£120
US	£84
HONG KONG	£108
FRANCE	£101



These men's Wayfarers were 30% cheaper in the US. While you can get them for less than £120 online, if you're travelling to the US, they're worth picking up.

## CANON EOS 450D DSLR CAMERA

UK	£499
US	£381
HONG KONG	£387
FRANCE	£568



In the US, this Best Buy is sold as the Rebel XSi but has the same 18-55mm IS lens. It's 23% cheaper than the UK, but you'd have to pay 15% VAT.

## OPIUM EAU DE PARFUM

UK	£60
US	£48
HONG KONG	£52
FRANCE	£66



Eau de parfum is around 20% cheaper in the US. The 1.6 fl oz bottle contains slightly less than the UK 50ml, but the price difference is still significant.

## APPLE IPOD CLASSIC

UK	£189
US	£150
HONG KONG	£147
FRANCE	£234



The prices of Apple products are controlled, but they still vary – buying in Hong Kong could save you 22% on a 160GB iPod. iPod warranties are global.

## BOLLINGER SPECIAL CHAMPAGNE

UK	£36
US	£42
HONG KONG	£44
FRANCE	£32



This champagne was cheaper from a French wine merchant than a UK retailer. It's cheaper still in Calais – we found it at Majestic in Calais for £26.

## GUCCI WATCH

UK	£915
US	£1,080
HONG KONG	£916
FRANCE	£1,128



Buying the Men's G Chrono watch (black) in London works out a couple of hundred pounds cheaper than buying it in Paris.