

**5** ways to save on Christmas. Each month we offer practical tips on how to save money

**1** The Canon Digital Ixus 65 is £210 at Jessops, £167 with Amazon (free delivery). Jessops says that if you see a product it sells cheaper online or at a UK high-street shop, it will give you 110 per cent of the difference if you buy it from them.

**2** Buy Christmas cards with care. Standard sizes now cost 32p to post first class, large (more than 24x16.5cm) is 44p. 50 standard cards cost £6 less to send than 50 large ones. A raised design may also cost more.

**3** To call abroad, use a prefix before the number. Signing to services like 18185.co.uk is free – but you may need internet access. A 30-minute call to an Australian landline on Christmas Day with 18185.co.uk is 34p; standard BT is £3.03 off peak, £7.23 peak.

**4** A box of six luxury crackers from John Lewis is £25, but six empty crackers to fill yourself is £6 (this will cost extra), or you can use a kit from craft stores or www.jesters.com. For £5.99 you get snaps, hats and mottos (you can choose from a selection of gifts, too, from 15p to £5).

**5** Buying CDs this Christmas? Don't assume big stores have the best prices. We found the Robbie Williams album *Rudebox* for £8.99 online at HMV and Virgin, but just £6.93 online at Asda and £6.99 at www.cd-wow.com – both with free delivery.

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN TRENHOLM

# Rip-off Britain?

Our shoppers test the price of food and drink in five countries

**N**o wonder the French coined the expression 'Vive la différence'. We sent shoppers to five countries to buy a basket of 16 items of food and drink and found France was the cheapest.

But Britain was a bargain, too, coming in second cheapest. The British total was less even than the United States'. Interestingly, when we carried out a survey in April we found that more than seven out of ten members of the public thought this country would be more expensive than the US.

Britain was the most expensive place for three items on our shopping list: Kellogg's Cornflakes, luxury ice cream and a six-pack of lager. It was cheapest for a whole chicken, broccoli and olive oil. The French bill of £35.63 was 28 per cent cheaper than in Britain. This reflects higher alcohol excise duties here, though even without booze, France was 10 per cent cheaper.

As *Which?* went to press, a ruling was expected from the EU Court of Justice which could allow goods from European countries to be delivered to British homes free of UK duty. This raises the possibility of UK shoppers ordering duty-free alcohol or cigarettes over the internet rather than relying on the booze cruise. If you are crossing the channel, the website www.day-tripper.net claims that perfumes in France are on average 15 per cent cheaper than here.

## Checklist

### Tips on how to cut your shopping bill

- Price-comparison website [mysupermarket.co.uk](http://mysupermarket.co.uk) claims it can save 20 per cent on a weekly shop. It searches four supermarkets (Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Ocado – Waitrose online) for goods similar to but cheaper than those you request and gives a running total. It's not very scientific when comparing volumes but is useful and free. See also [www.trollydolly.co.uk](http://www.trollydolly.co.uk) or Tesco's price checker, [www.tesco.com/todayattesco/pricecheck.shtml](http://www.tesco.com/todayattesco/pricecheck.shtml).
- Consumer behaviour expert Jeff Bray told *Which?* it can be hard to find cheapest-value lines because they are normally placed very high or low on the shelf. He says: 'They don't want the value products to be those you see most of.'
- Buying in bulk can save money but not always. Our shopper in Britain found a 200g jar of Nescafé Original 58p cheaper per 100g compared with the 500g jar.
- Own-brand medicines are cheaper than big names such as Nurofen and have the same active ingredients.

## Our verdict

Britain compares well with most countries on the cost of food and general groceries but it's worth shopping around. Lower taxes mean shopping for Champagne and beer in France is still a good bet.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We bought 16 items of food and drink from supermarkets in major cities in Britain, France, Germany, USA and Australia between 22 September and 10 October

### Without alcohol

France	£16.84
Britain	£18.76
United States	£20.70
Australia	£22.79
Germany	£27.37

### With alcohol

France	£35.63
Britain	£49.19
Germany	£51.08
Australia	£59.72
United States	£75.51

