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Local Handmade Items Make Travel Memories Last

GG Staff | May 8, 2014 - 07:28

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Travel far, shop local

Please welcome **Brette Sember**, travel shopper extraordinaire who has a taste for flavors around the world. **Brette is the author of more than 50 books. She blogs about travel, travel shopping and food.**

We're a community-based travel blog and we welcome submissions from everyone. Whether you're a budget-baller or a first class only kinda traveler, we'd love to hear from you. Visit our [Writer's Guidelines](#) and learn how you can share your travel advice, stories and adventures!

The art of travel shopping

One of the best ways to keep your travel memories alive is to bring home unique souvenirs that were handmade in the area you visited. You won't find these in outlet malls, department stores or cruise ship terminals. The hunt for special mementos begins to guide your journey and as you get to know your destination, you'll have a feel for exactly what you can bring home that will keep the trip alive for you long after you've unpacked.



A unique piece of art glass from Colorado Springs, CO

What to shop for

Before traveling, take some time to research the area, by Googling the country or region and "shopping" or "local crafts."

- Fodor's almost always has a section for each destination about shopping and often will mention local craft items.
- Find out if there are local materials that are considered special because local craftsmen often will focus on using indigenous items (for example turquoise in the American Southwest).
- Be on the lookout for are products that are made only in the area you are visiting (like fisherman-knit sweaters from the [west coast of Ireland](#)) or items with unique symbols associated with the area (such as the fleur de lis in France).
- Take the time to determine if there are local artisans renowned for specific skills. For example, craftsmen in Florence, Italy are known for their leather work and some in Hawaii for specially patterned quilts.
- Discover if there are food products that the area is

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Most Recent Comments

On [Orient Beach - St. Martin/St. Maarten](#), WG said "My wife and I went to Orient Beach last year and had a great time. We have been all over the Caribbean and I consider Orient Beach to be the best! It's lively, lots of people, music, and able to feel totally free by being nude. It ought to be on everyone's Bucket List."

On [New Orleans Newbie Guide](#), Jeff Hammerberg said "Excellent article :)"

On [Well Furnished with Love](#), Xandra O'Neill said "This is so beautiful. What a wonderful way of viewing the world and those we love. Thank you for sharing. Xandra "

On [9 Delish Reasons to Travel to Isla Mujeres](#), Monica said "Great post! I'm heading back to Isla on Sunday for my (oh I can't even count anymore)...too many favorite restaurants: but a few are Bally Hoo's for fish Taco's, Barlito's, Soggy Peso, Freddy's Medina (next to Roosters), The Joint, The Mango Cafe, La Bruja. I'm looking forward to trying some new places this trip too"



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known for (such as lemons in the Amalfi coast area of Italy).



Murano glass from Italy

Use these specialties to guide your shopping – when you bring home something locally made, you truly



Basket from St Thomas made solely of beach refuse

bring home a piece of the place you visited.

I recently bought a basket in St. Thomas made only out of beach refuse that had washed up on the shores of that island. When we visited a Pueblo in New Mexico, I bought a Taos wedding vase (a vase with two necks), used for wedding ceremonies on the pueblo.

Focusing your

interest

Once you discover the unique items to be found at your destination, consider what appeals to you. When you create collections of items, you'll find ways to group your buys together and create displays with them once you get them back home. Remember to stay focused on what has meaning to you. I went to France but because we don't drink, I wasn't interested in wine or anything involving grapes, however I did bring home a Christmas ornament in the shape of a macaroon. You'll be most successful if you have defined types of items that you are always on the hunt for, such as clothing, local cookbooks or vases.



One of my many groupings of bookmarks collected from my travels

The list of items I always look for include:

- Baskets
- Pottery and ceramics
- Sheep
- Glass art and glassware
- Prints and paintings of the area
- Dishes and tableware
- Jewelry
- Easter eggs and egg cups



Ceramic plate from Sorrento, Italy

However, I don't limit myself to these categories and am always excited to learn about unique and special crafts or items that can't be found elsewhere, such as the conch shell carved into a fish from the Bahamas or a china teacup in the

On 5 Nudist Resorts that Will Blow Your Mind, Mark said "Important note about Sea Mountain Inn! Yes it's nudist, but it's also "Lifestyle" which means that public sex is a big part of it. For someone just expecting a nudist resort it could be a major issue to be surrounded by some pretty wild in-your-face sexual activity. If it's your thing, you'll be in heaven. If it's not, you'll kick yourself for not knowing."

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Carved conch shell from the Bahamas

- Jams and jellies
- Bottled sauces
- Dried herbs
- Baking mixes
- Christmas ornaments
- Pens
- Cards and notepads

same pattern as the embroidered headboard in the Queen's bedroom on the royal yacht anchored in Scotland.

If you don't know where to start, but just know you want to bring something home, search out inexpensive locally made items:

- Magnets
- Bookmarks
 - Soap

Columbia.

The trick is to start with cheap, easy to find items (for example you can always buy a plastic magnet at the airport) to begin to build a collection. Then seek out locally made items (for example, I have a magnet from the Bahamas that has a piece of coral and one of their pennies on a handmade little straw basket).



basket from Juneau Alaska, made by Native Americans

Don't be afraid to give into a cheap souvenir if speaks to you. My mom collects what are called floaty pens – cheap plastic pens that have a see-through center almost like a snow globe with little floating pieces showing scenes from the destination. One is a cheap and easy souvenir – 40 of them from all your destinations displayed together is an interesting collection that evokes many memories.

Where to shop



Mussel shell wreath from Rocky Neck, MA

Discovering what to buy is only half the battle. You next have to find a place to buy it. If you're very lucky you'll find a shop or cooperative that features the work of local artists and craftsmen. If the shopping gods are truly with you, you'll find a large grouping

of artisans or artisan shops, such as Rocky Neck in Massachusetts, the High Road to Taos, New Mexico or Palm Passage in St. Thomas, but for the most part this is the chupacabra of travel shopping – often rumored but rarely in existence.

It can be more challenging to find places to buy locally made items when you are in big cities, but galleries often sell inexpensive prints of local art. They may also carry other **handmade items**, like pottery, baskets, jewelry, cards, soap and more. Museum gift shops are another excellent place to browse. A tiny art gallery in Naples, Florida revealed an



Lace items from Bayeux, France

extensive collection of locally made baskets, jewelry, and scarves. Local factory or production shops are an excellent choice. We visited a soap factory in Hawaii where we bought beautiful plumeria scented bars of soap. A tea plantation in Charleston yielded locally grown tea.

Just because you don't want t-shirts doesn't mean you should skip the local tourist shopping area. Tucked in between the souvenir stores everyone else is swarming into, you may find shops that sell locally made items. Large branded stores are usually not going to yield locally made treasures, but junky souvenir shops can offer surprises. Sometimes you'll find a tiny corner of the shop housing some locally made items. In Aruba I found a corner of a rundown t-shirt shop that sold local driftwood art.



Another method to finding places to shop involves talking to people. Approach the concierge at your hotel and explain what you are looking for. When in shops

selling artisan goods, ask the shopkeeper if there are any similar stores in the area. Pick up a copy of the local paper (if it is in English) and look for art or craft shows while you are there. Take a **walking tour** to uncover the hidden gems. In Aruba I read about an event at a small local art school where I ended up buying a dish painted with a divi divi tree – the unofficial symbol of Aruba. Go to street fairs and festivals. St. Martin has a once a week night festival where I bought art and a hand woven basket.

If you're a dedicated travel shopper, the hunt for items to bring home becomes part of the thrill of your journey. Even if you are a casual shopper seeking a few souvenirs, your unique finds will always serve as a very visible reminder of your trip.

We'd love to hear about your travel shopping adventures. Connect with us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) – and let's continue the conversation!

About Brette Sember

Brette Sember grew up fascinated with the treasures her grandparents brought back from their travels as they visited every continent but Antarctica. Her passion for travel includes unique shopping finds, local foods, and breathing in the air of new places. Sember is the author of more than 50 books about



**Brette Sember ~
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food, divorce, organizing, credit, business, pregnancy, parenting, as well as college textbooks. She is also a professional indexer, ghostwriter, and freelancer. She blogs about food, travel, organizing, decorating, and gardens at PuttingItAllOnTheTable.com. She lives in Clarence, NY with her husband, two children, two golden retrievers and tortoise. Catch up with Brette on [Pinterest](#), [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

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