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Travel shopping rules for bringing home your treasures

2012/09/27by [Donna Hull](#)

Last week in her article, [Travel shopping brings your journey home with you](#), Brette Sember discussed how to plan your shopping and where to find the best shops. Today she focuses on how to get the most out of your shopping and how to bring those treasures home.



Travel Shopping Rules

Follow these rules when you are in the stores:

- **Ask questions.** Ask where items were made. This can completely change your shopping mindset. In Venice, for example, there are many shops with lace (and [Burano, an island near Venice](#), is historically known for lace-making), however nearly all of the lace in shops is mass produced in Asia and is not locally produced.
- **Hone in on unusual items.** If you spot something in a shop that you've never seen before, ask what it is. You will stumble upon interesting local products. I spotted a unique two-necked vase in a pueblo shop in Taos, New Mexico and learned it was a traditional wedding vase used in the marriage ceremony to symbolize two-into-one.
- **If you see it; buy it.** This is a rule I have learned through many disappointments! If there is a specific item you are hoping to find, buy the first one you see that is close to being right. You may never find another one and you will always regret passing it up. The subset of this rule is that if you have already bought something, but see a similar item that is much better, buy it too. You'll regret coming home without it. You can give the first item as a gift.
- **Know the rules about bargaining.** It is rarely acceptable to bargain in an established shop, but sometimes it doesn't hurt to ask for a discount if you are buying a lot or purchasing an item that is damaged in some way. When shopping at outdoor vendors you often are expected to bargain.

Tips for Shopping Abroad

Before you go, research the taxes. Many countries charge a tax that is refundable if you spent a certain amount in one store. You can get an automatic refund at the store or may have to present your receipt at the airport or border.

Use a credit card that does not charge a fee for foreign transactions. Many do charge a small amount each time you buy something and it really adds up. If you wish to pay in cash, it often makes more sense to withdraw local currency from an ATM (where you'll pay a dollar or two for the transaction) than to bring cash and pay a fee to convert it at a currency exchange.

If you do not understand the amount you are being told to pay, look at the cash register display or ask the clerk to write it down. Count your change carefully, since it will be unfamiliar to you.

Keep all of your receipts in one place (an envelope or section of your wallet or purse) since you may be asked to show them when you go through customs.

Getting It All Home

Getting all of your purchases home can be a challenge with airline luggage restrictions. I have several solutions:

- **Pack a suitcase within a suitcase.** You'll pay for the extra bag on the way home, but you'll have space for everything.
- **Bring a lightweight fabric duffel or tote in your luggage.** You are always allowed one carry on and one "personal item" on a flight. Depending on what else you are carrying on and the size of the extra bag you choose, this may qualify as either item and will allow you to carry home items that will not fit in your suitcase (or which would put your suitcase over the weight limit). This is also a good way to transport items that are very breakable, as long as you wrap them carefully and make sure the bag is not smushed in the overhead compartment.
- **Pack lightly in the biggest suitcase you have, even for a short trip.** This ensures plenty of room for purchases.
- **Lighten your load before coming home.** Toss guidebooks, mostly empty bottles of bathroom products, magazines, and any cheap clothing you planned to be disposable.
- **Ship it.** Many stores will pack and ship items for you. Take them up on their offer, but always get tracking information.
- **Ship it yourself.** If you are traveling within the U.S., bring a few flat fee Priority Mail boxes with you. You can fill these (there is no weight limit) and pay the flat fee to ship them home. It's much cheaper than paying for an extra suitcase.
- **Bring bubble wrap.** Most stores do a very good job wrapping items if you ask them to ship; but if you are shipping it yourself, or planning to get it home in your luggage, bubble wrap will make sure your new treasure gets there in one piece.

Shopping Remorse

I have never regretted buying something, but I have regretted NOT buying some items. In fact, I have an entire museum in my mind of things I loved and should have bought. Sometimes you get confused about what you really want or you get scared away by a price tag and don't buy something on your trip. And sometimes you make that cardinal mistake of being sure you'll find something better later in the trip.

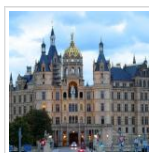
Fortunately, the internet is your friend. I failed to buy a beautiful vase I saw in a museum shop on one trip. When I got home, I realized that I should have bought it. I found the museum online and emailed the store. I described the vase and where it was in the store. They gave me the artist's name. I Googled her and was able to buy one directly from her, using the photos she emailed me. One less item in the museum of my mind. Be aware that some artisans are just hard to pin down. I saw some driftwood artwork in Aruba that wasn't quite right. I managed to find the artist online. She promised to send me a link or photos of other pieces she had available. She dropped off the face of the earth and never answered another email. If you are in a store and can't decide about something, always take their business card so that you can contact them later if you change your mind.

Travel shopping is the best part of a trip in my opinion, because it allows you to bring your travels home with you.

Brette Sember is a dedicated travel shopper who writes about her experiences at www.TravelShoppingExpert.com. She blogs about food, travel, books, collecting and more at <http://PuttingItAllontheTable.com>.

Do you have tips to add to Brette's list of travel shopping rules? Post a comment to share your strategies. Brette's articles have inspired me to go shopping on my next trip.

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[Donna Hull](#)

A boomer travel and lifestyle authority who is exploring the world one activity at a time. Besides writing and publishing **My Itchy Travel Feet**, she also writes about boomer travel for [My Well-Being Powered by Humana](#), [Make It Missoula](#) and is the author of [My Itchy Travel Feet: Breathtaking Adventure Vacation Ideas](#).

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[Vera Marie Badertscher](#)

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[September 27, 2012 at 9:12 am](#)

It is also important to check the rules for what you are allowed to bring back into the United States. Don't be overwhelmed by the customs form you have to fill out. You don't have to list items bought for personal use—so go ahead and pack clothing items with your other clothing, for instance. And you don't have to list things of tiny value—the \$2 stocking stuffer gifts. Also check to see the rules about foodstuffs (Agriculture dept). I once thought a sausage from Austria was okay because it was sealed in a package—but NO meat! It's easier to know in advance than to see your lovely souvenir get left behind—or be hit with a large sum to pay at customs.

Vera Marie Badertscher recently posted..[Travel to Tucson for Spanish Mission and Fry Bread](#)

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[Donna Hull](#)

Twitter: [DonnaLHull](#)

[September 27, 2012 at 2:14 pm](#)

Vera, thanks for sharing more very important shopping tips. These are very helpful.

And, I will add that in some countries, you are expected to bargain, even in established shops. This is especially true in the Middle East. The same is true in China. Of course, much depends on the quantity and quality of the items that you are purchasing. When Alan and I went pearl shopping in Shanghai, bargaining was very much expected.

Donna Hull recently posted..[Travel shopping rules for bringing home your treasures](#)

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FEV [September 27, 2012 at 3:39 pm](#)

Before I go to a destination with shopping in mind, I also do research online to find what are considered to be the best items to bring home, and perhaps find prices online too. It helps to have as much information as you can before you leave.

But – sometimes all of the guidelines go out the window and I just buy something because I like it!

Thanks for the article. Some good tips here!

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[Donna Hull](#)

Twitter: [DonnaLHull](#)

[October 2, 2012 at 2:30 pm](#)

Smart shopping suggestions. Thanks!

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[sheryl](#) [September 27, 2012 at 6:01 pm](#)

Great tips. I have such mixed feelings about shopping when I travel. On the one hand, it takes away from other pursuits...but on the other, it's always nice to look at something, once home, and have the memories of a wonderful trip brought back.

sheryl recently posted..[Valuable Lessons Learned from Aging](#) ❤️

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[October 2, 2012 at 2:30 pm](#)

I don't mind shopping if it's only for a little while. If it gets in the way of seeing a destination, then I forget about the shopping.

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[Heatheronhertravels](#)

Twitter: [Heathercowper](#)

[September 30, 2012 at 4:55 am](#)

I agree with the tip about buy it when you see it – so many times I have thought I might go back to buy something and never had time. However as I try to travel light I typically limit my purchases to small items that will fit in my carry on bag – apart from the time that I brought back a coloured glass chandelier from Murano in Venice which now hangs in my dining room!

Heatheronhertravels recently posted..[5 of the top historical sites in Egypt](#) ❤️

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[October 2, 2012 at 2:29 pm](#)

Oh my, I get bringing back the glass chandelier was a challenge 😊.

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[Irene](#)

Twitter: [moretime2travel](#)

[September 30, 2012 at 10:21 am](#)

Nice post. Shopping does expand your horizons—especially if you stay away from the tourist-y gift shops and shop with locals.

Irene recently posted..[Ostuni, Italy: White City on the Adriatic](#) ❤️

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[Donna Hull](#)

Twitter: [DonnaLHull](#)

[October 2, 2012 at 2:28 pm](#)

I like the jewelry shops myself. It's like wearing a piece of the trip.

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[Heather](#)

Twitter: [writemix](#)

[October 1, 2012 at 6:57 am](#)

Brette has good solid ideas. I like the flat rate shipping boxes, will take those on my next press trip so I can mail home all my treasures. Good stuff.

Heather recently posted..[Signs, Signs, Wherefore Art Thou?](#)

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[Melanie](#)

Twitter: [frugalkiwi](#)

[October 1, 2012 at 5:34 pm](#)

Great tip about the bubble wrap!

Melanie recently posted..[Perfectly Peeled Eggs: Secret Revealed!](#)

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[Mark H](#) [October 2, 2012 at 1:46 pm](#)

Watch the customs rules of every country you plan to enter after shopping. Australia and NZ have tough agricultural rules that makes a lot of food shopping fairly limited and other countries vary in their guidelines and duty free limits.

Mark H recently posted..[Taieri Gorge Train: A Photo-Journey \(Dunedin, New Zealand\)](#)

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[Donna Hull](#)

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[October 2, 2012 at 2:26 pm](#)

Mark, that's smart shopping advice. Thanks for the reminder.

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[merr](#) [October 3, 2012 at 12:52 pm](#)

This is a wonderful primer on shopping while traveling. I, too, have not regretted a special purchase while abroad or traveling. But I might have wished I'd purchased one or two special items more.

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[Donna Hull](#)

Twitter: [DonnaLHull](#)

[October 6, 2012 at 10:52 pm](#)

I've had shopper's remorse once or twice and agree with, Brette. If you see it and love it, but the item as you might not find it at your next stop on a trip.

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[MyKidsEatSquid](#) [October 5, 2012 at 12:38 pm](#)

What a great idea to pack a suitcase within a suitcase so you have room for your purchases. It always seems that the amount you carry home multiplies while traveling, whether you do a lot of shopping or just a little.

MyKidsEatSquid recently posted..[Kitchen renovation: Lighting](#)

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[Kris](#) [October 6, 2012 at 9:57 pm](#)

That first tip is so important. I mean, who wants to buy a souvenir made in another country and imported? I live in Hawaii and we have a big "made in Hawaii" initiative

happening here. The trouble is, many visitors don't know to look for that label, and will just buy an "aloha" item without thinking about it.

Kris recently posted..[Avoiding GMOs in our Diet](#) 

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[Donna Hull](#)

Twitter: [DonnaLHull](#)

[October 6, 2012 at 10:49 pm](#)

Thanks for telling us about the made in Hawaii initiative. I agree that shopping local is a bit more work for the travel shopper but so worthwhile.

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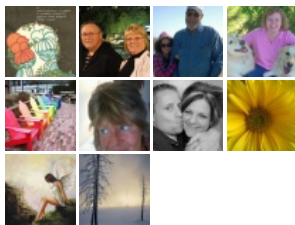
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