

## Great British walks: Put your best foot forward this winter



With Britain's landscapes blissfully deserted, wrap up warm and stride out, says **Mark Rowe**



## Wander past some walls of wonder in Sao Paulo

There's art wherever you turn on the streets of Brazil's largest city, **Patrick Welch** took it all in

## Fly buy: a world of shopping breaks (for every wallet)



Need inspiration for your Christmas list or simply want to know where the locals shop? How to make the most of a bargain-hunting holiday



## Love opera or hate it – Florence is the perfect place to find your voice

**Kate Simon** enjoys an Italian city break with a difference on a weekend that combines the history of music with singing lessons



## 48 Hours In: Hanover

Lower Saxony's capital is even more appealing with new flights and Christmas markets



## Travel Agenda

Our weekly guide to where to go and what to know



## Ignorance is not bliss

**Simon Calder:** Suppose you are booked to fly for a Manhattan short break. What would you do?

# Traveller's Guide: Shopping breaks

Need some inspiration for your Christmas list or simply want to know where the locals shop? Sarah Gordon tells you how to make the most of a bargain-hunting holiday

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Shopping and travel have always made the most delightful bedfellows. Whether it's digging out an unusual trinket from a lively local market, finding that backstreet where the Parisians go for affordable style or grabbing discounted designer gear at a shopping mall, nothing beats the thrill of a bargain abroad, or finding something unique or unusual that you wouldn't be able to pick up on the high street at home. Shopping has become so much a part of the holiday experience that specialist trips, tours and hotels now offer the chance to combine retail with repose.

Some cater specifically for the female market. For example, in Italy, the Palazzo Victoria hotel in Verona (00 39 045 590 566; [palazzovictoria.com](http://palazzovictoria.com)) has a girls-only weekend package with a three-course dinner, in-room gift, hairstyling session and a VIP shopping experience – taking guests to selected boutiques for a private evening shop. Two nights, with breakfast, costs from €594.50 per person. Flights not included.

For those who simply want to factor in a bargain hunt to a regular holiday, consider time-saving tours that take you directly to hard-to-find souvenirs and crafts. Discover Walks (00 33 9 70 44 97 24; [discoverwalks.com](http://discoverwalks.com)) offers a tour through Paris's famous flea market, the Marché aux Puces St-Ouen de Clignancourt, helping antiques hunters to get their bearings and find the best bargains among the maze of 2,500 shops. A tour costs €22 per person.

The run-up to Christmas is prime shopping time, when cities entice holidaymakers with the notion of stocking up with gifts during a short break. In Europe, Christmas markets see a flurry of festive stalls sprinkled around squares in cities ranging from Birmingham to Berlin. They began in the 15th century in Germany and Austria; Nuremberg, in the former, remains the biggest and most famous of them all, attracting more than two million visitors a year (00 49 911 23360; [christkindlesmarkt.de](http://christkindlesmarkt.de)).

But not all markets have to be Christmas themed. Hotels and tour operators often offer the expertise of a local guide who can help to unravel the complexities of Moroccan souks or simply help with a bit of haggling. Fleewinter (020-7112 0019; [fleewinter.co.uk](http://fleewinter.co.uk)) has a network of mostly English and French residents in Marrakech who, for £90 per half-day, will take clients to the best stalls in the souks, but also to lesser-known shops and warehouses in the city's new town and the industrial quarter.

While New York City is world famous for its shopping and competitive prices, many visitors are often unaware that a number of other states, such as Texas and Louisiana, also offer tax free shopping for tourists. To combine culture with bargain-hunting, Virgin Holidays (0844 557 3859; [virginholidays.co.uk](http://virginholidays.co.uk)) has a seven-night trip to New Orleans, Louisiana, from £1,085, including flights from Heathrow and room-only at the Holiday Inn French Quarter.

For something more bespoke, consider Asia: Vietnam, Thailand and Hong Kong are perfect for picking up tailor-made suits and entire wardrobe updates at affordable prices. Kuoni (0844 488 0241; [kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk)) offers a nine-night tour of Vietnam taking in Halong Bay, Hanoi and Hue from £1,799 per person. There is also enough time in Hoi An to order clothes from one of the dozens of tailors in this pretty coastal town. The package price includes flights from Gatwick, hotels and most meals. A typical tailor-made suit or made-to-measure dress costs from £90. Try Thu Thuy Silk ([www.hoianthuthuysilk.com](http://www.hoianthuthuysilk.com)) or Yaly ([yalycouture.com](http://yalycouture.com)).

## Leaders in luxury

If high style is on your agenda, then look no further than Paris. Wexas (020-7838 5892; [wexas.com](http://wexas.com)) has a three-night stay at the five-star Pont Royal Paris, including a three-hour tailored tour of the top fashion haunts. The £495pp price includes accommodation, Eurostar from London and the tour. In Marrakech at Riad El Fenn (00 212 524 441210; [riadelfenn.com](http://riadelfenn.com)), experts will guide guests around the souks on a tailored tour. A two-night stay, with breakfast, afternoon tea and shopping trip, costs from €540 per room. Flights and transfers extra.

The Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong (00 852 2522 0111; [mandarinoriental.com/hongkong](http://mandarinoriental.com/hongkong)) offers a private shopping tour that can take in the high-end shopping district or traditional markets with haggling help from your guide. B&B doubles start at HK\$4,900 (£395).

## Make mine a mall

America has historically led the way with shopping malls (see Minnesota's Mall of America, or "the Megamall" - [mallofamerica.com](http://mallofamerica.com)). However, Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai are determined to steal its crown by adding ice-rinks, indoor ski slopes, canals and restaurants.

Premium Outlets ([premiumoutlets.com](http://premiumoutlets.com)) has malls all over the US packed with discounted designer shops. Two of the most popular are Woodbury Common, near New York City, and Orlando Premium Outlets.

In Europe, Chic Outlet Shopping Villages (01869 323200; [chicoutletshopping.com](http://chicoutletshopping.com)) has malls near Paris, Milan, Barcelona, Madrid and Brussels where you can find Armani and Burberry.

## The personal touch

Private tours can make the most of your time by highlighting the best places to spend your cash. In Milan, above, Viator (020-3318 0421; [viator.com](http://viator.com)) offers a half-day tour of shops from £111.

Chic Shopping Paris (00 33 6 77 65 08 01; [chicshoppingparis.com](http://chicshoppingparis.com)) offers four-hour tours of the French capital to find designer goods in consignment shops, from €100 per person.

Seek New York Tours (001 888 274 8580; [seeknewyorktours.com](http://seeknewyorktours.com)) offers a three-hour vintage clothing tour from \$75 (£47) per person. In London, Urban Gentry (020-8149 6253; [urbangentry.com](http://urbangentry.com)) offers a three-hour Super Style tour taking in the capital's independent and cutting-edge brands. A tour for up to five guests costs £165.

The emirate has a month-long shopping festival in January ([dubaievents.ae](http://dubaievents.ae)).

## Dubai or not Dubai

The Mall of the Emirates (00 971 4 409 9000; [malloftheemirates.com](http://malloftheemirates.com)) has 250 international brand stores and two hotels, the Hotel Pullman ([pullmanhotels.com](http://pullmanhotels.com)) with doubles from €179; and the Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates ([kempinski.com](http://kempinski.com)) with B&B doubles from Dh135 (£228).

Head to the gold and spice souks for a more authentic shopping experience.

## Markets and mistletoe

Get into the festive spirit with a tour of Europe's glittering Christmas markets. Leger Holidays (0844 846 0808; [www.leger.co.uk](http://www.leger.co.uk)) has seven-day tours of markets in Salzburg, Munich, above, and Innsbruck from £379 including coach travel, B&B and four dinners.

Two Christmas markets combine with a free ice-skating rink in Kungstradgarden Park in Stockholm. Skansen market has stallholders dressed in 19th-century garb (weekends from 24 November). In the Old Town, Stortorget square sells jams and homemade sausages daily from the same date. British Airways (0844 493 0787; [ba.com](http://ba.com)) has two nights' B&B at the Hotel Attaché including flights from £189pp.

Prague hosts markets in the Old Town Square and Wenceslas Square. Carrier (0161 491 7650; [carrier.co.uk](http://carrier.co.uk)) has three nights' B&B at the Augustine Hotel from £425pp, including flights.

## Count on a cruise

One of the major benefits of taking to sea for a shopping trip is the unlimited luggage allowance and the number of places you can cover in one short trip.

Fred Olsen (01473 746175; [fredolsencruises.com](http://fredolsencruises.com)) has an antiques-themed voyage for 2013, led by Antiques Roadshow expert Lars Tharp. The 14-night Art of the Mediterranean cruise departs from Southampton and visits Spain, Corsica and Portugal. Prices start at £1,459 for an inside cabin, including all meals and entertainment.

Cruise and Maritime Voyages (0845 430 0274; [cruiseandmaritime.com](http://cruiseandmaritime.com)) has a three-night Christmas markets cruise, departing from London Tilbury Docks and calling at Antwerp – for markets in Bruges and Brussels – and Amsterdam. The cruise costs from £219 per person including all meals and departs on 16 December.

Celebrity Cruises (0844 493 2043; [celebritycruises.co.uk](http://celebritycruises.co.uk)) now has the Celebrity iLounge – making it the first authorised Apple reseller at sea.