shopping



SHOPPING TIPS Shopping in a foreign country offers the opportunity to bring home a touch of "foreign flavor": souvenirs, clothing, shoes, paintings, and many other great options. Here are some guidelines for shopping in Europe.

- Check the main shopping areas and store hours in the cities where you have time scheduled to shop. Store hours are more limited in Europe than we are used to in the States, with many stores closing for lunch and by 6:00 p.m.
- Carry a list of currencies and the current exchange rates for each country you will visit. This information will be included in your Trip Documents. You can use the calculator on your phone to help convert the prices from the local currency into U.S. Dollars.
- Keep your receipts and a record of all purchases. This can be helpful at customs and when reconciling statements.
- Be sure of your purchase before you pay; exchanges and returns are not as easy in Europe as in the U.S.
- Be certain the item is "legal" to bring into the U.S. For a list of prohibited items, consult www.tsa.gov.
- Remember the old adage, "buyer beware" when buying "authentic" items. It would be very disappointing to discover the item was not the real thing after making a costly purchase.

SHIPPING PURCHASES Many shops will ship your purchases home at your expense. The advantage is that you'll have less to carry during your trip. You may send

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packages with a value of less than $200 duty free. If the contents are worth $200 or more, you will have to pay duty upon delivery or pickup of your package in the U.S. No matter what the salesperson may tell you - duty must be paid when receiving the package in the U.S. If you ship something worth less than $200, write "Unsolicited Gift" on it. Usually, the post office is the cheapest way to mail things home. If you decide to have your purchases shipped, be sure they are paid for completely, including shipping and handling! We do not recommend shipping glass or other breakable items, but if you decide to do so, purchase insurance that covers breakage during shipping. Image Tours is not responsible for anything you buy or anything you ship home. Keep records of each purchase including the receipt, store name, address, phone and fax number, email address, and name of the person assisting you. You may even want to take a photo of your purchase, in the event you receive the wrong item! Keep in mind that shipping by sea mail may take three months or longer.

TAX REFUNDS At your point of departure from the European Union, you may request a refund on the value-added-tax (VAT) paid on all merchandise purchased within the European Union. Please note, VAT refunds will only be considered if you have obtained a tax refund check when buying the item(s).

- If your merchandise is in your carry-on, following check-in at your European Union departure city airport, proceed through passport control and then stop at the customs office. After obtaining the required customs stamp, you can get your VAT refund (minus a service fee) at one of several refund counters such as "Global Blue," "TaxFreeWorldwide," or "Premier Tax Free."
- If you packed your merchandise in your checked luggage, check-in at your European Union departure city airport, to obtain your boarding pass. Advise the check-in person that you'd like your luggage back, as you need to request a tax refund, and ask for directions to the Customs Tax Refund Office. With your tagged luggage, boarding pass, passport, goods purchased and tax refund form proceed to the Customs Tax Refund Office. Once you have obtained the customs stamp, your luggage is automatically routed to your flight. On the way to your gate, you can collect your VAT refund (minus a service fee) at one of the refund counters.
- For merchandise purchased in a non-European Union country (Switzerland or Liechtenstein), talk to your Tour Manager prior to crossing the border and departing these countries so he/she can try to allow time to visit the customs office at the border.

DUTY FREE SHOPPING Most international airports have duty-free merchandise shops. As a precaution, check the duty-free allowance for these purchases. If you have a connecting flight, purchased liquids will need to be packed in your suitcase after clearing customs (and before returning your luggage to the domestic airline) at the first U.S. airport on your itinerary.

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