

# Can you still save money by shopping abroad?



**With the weak pound and high taxes, buying alcohol and tobacco in bulk abroad may not be as cheap as it once was. But, says DAVID ASH, there are plenty of real savings still to be made across the Channel for your 'essentials'**

strength of the Euro against the pound and recent tax rises in France, you may think it's no longer worth it. But it is, if you follow a few rules.

The good news is that 10 years ago a day trip would cost you about £64. Now it's around £20. Obviously the value of the Euro has increased and French tax rises mean that spirits aren't such attractive offers right now. But cigarettes are still about 20 per cent cheaper, and rolling tobacco will save you at least 33 per cent off UK prices. Pop up the road to Adinkerke in Belgium (about 40

minutes drive from Calais) and you will save even more – 36 per cent on cigarettes and around 67 per cent on rolling tobacco.

While you're there, treat yourself to some chocolate. In the nearby coastal town of De Panne, a 1kg box of Leonidas chocolate will cost you about £17.80 – a saving of £21.20 on the same box in London. Buying chocolate in a local French shop will cost more than in Belgium, but the quality and presentation are superb.

Duty on wine in France is around four pence per bottle as opposed to

about £1.60 here. For the same price you pay in Britain, you will get nicer wine and the choice will be wider too. French wines should be bought in a supermarket or wine shop, but for New World wines head to one of the large 'cash and carry' stores. Calais is still a good place to buy wine and if you're travelling via Zeebrugge, make your way to the Auchan hypermarket in Dunkirk. In general, you get what you pay for but offers and discounted wines at the end of the aisles are often good value so don't ignore them!

Beer, especially the small bottles of weaker beer commonly found in French supermarkets, remains good value, as do Belgian beers. However, some items, especially UK brands of spirits and whisky, may be cheaper to get at home, although most savings here are dependent on short-term offers, large quantities or from a limited number of stores.

French supermarkets are very supportive of local producers, the result is a better variety and quality of food so spare some time to browse the fresh food counters.

You can get even more bargains at factory retail shops near Lille, Paris and Troyes. In France, sale times are defined by law and what shops are allowed to sell at discounted prices is highly regulated. Items in a sale must be genuinely discounted, and if seconds, they are clearly marked. Factory retail shops, however, can sell discontinued lines and overstock at discounted prices even at non-sale times.

So despite claims that booze cruises have been sunk, there are still big savings to be made by shopping abroad. Bon voyage! \*

## DOS AND DON'TS



**✗ Don't overload your car. A case of beer weighs roughly 17kg (37.5lb), 12 bottles of wine 15kg (33lb) and champagne 22kg (48.5lb). Penalties start at £60 plus three penalty points. Visit theaa.com and search loading your car safely for advice.**

✓ Do check the price of the items you want to buy before you go – look at mysupermarket.co.uk for UK prices and then calaiswine.co.uk, pidou.com and auchandrive.fr for French prices.

**✗ Don't buy ferry or rail tickets from websites that show no address, direct email contact or phone number – it may be a marketing firm and not a travel agency and have hidden administration charges.**

✓ Do consider travelling by ferry – journey times are longer but fares can be cheaper, and starting the day with a good English



breakfast on board will keep you going.

✓ **Do treat yourself to a bit of luxury. P&O Ferries (poferies.com) have a Club Lounge and DFDS (dfdsseaways.co.uk) have a De Luxe Lounge.**

✗ Don't be a timid shopper – buy tinned products, but if you're vegetarian watch out for those containing chicken stock (poulet, volaille) or flavoured with goose fat (graisse d'oie).

✓ **Do consider buying meat. It's not cheaper in France but they have better quality cuts of meat with less fat.**

✓ Do buy sweeteners and sugars as there is a greater variety – try La Perruche sugar cubes.

✗ **Don't forget to check out the pasta and pulses aisles at the supermarket.**

✓ Do stick to the guidelines: 3,200 cigarettes, 3kg rolling tobacco, 90 litres wine (120 bottles), 110 litres beer (about nine cases of canned beer), 10 litres spirits, 20 litres fortified wine. These figures are per person, not per vehicle!

✗ **Don't buy fuel on autoroutes. Look for a nearby supermarket where you can pay using English credit and debit cards on automatic machines.**



**W**e all remember the infamous booze cruises of the 80s, when national newspapers would offer a day trip to France for £1 where you could buy alcohol and cigarettes cheaper than in Britain. With the

### TOP TIPS TO SAVE MONEY

£ **Check out day-tripper.net before you go for everything you need to know about shopping and saving in France and Belgium.**

£ Shop around for the cheapest ferry fares. There are offers available online, but phone Eurotunnel (08443 35 35 35) as their best offers are not always online.

£ **Order currency online before travelling. Travelex (travelex.co.uk) pre-ordered online rates are among the best.**

£ Take sterling cash as well. Many shops offer better rates for sterling cash purchases.

£ **Travel when sales are on – they generally run for five weeks from mid-January and early July.**

£ Buy petrol at home but diesel in France (it's about 16 per cent cheaper).

£ **Find time for a meal – French restaurants still offer good savings compared with the UK.**

£ Wine fairs are held at most French supermarkets in September and October.

£ **Take a cool bag for cheese and fish purchases as these items are usually cheaper in France (especially prawns).**

£ If you have time, get tyres changed or your car serviced and save up to 34 per cent on UK prices.



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