

MONEY SAVER:

Airport duty-free

Should you buy it or bypass it? **Lee Cobaj** has a good browse

WHAT IS DUTY?

Although airport shopping has become synonymous with the phrase 'duty-free', most of it is simply discounted by the retailer, a bit like a mini outlet mall. Excise duty on goods applies exclusively to tobacco and alcohol, and you can avoid paying it only if you're flying beyond the EU, which is why stickers sometimes show two prices. Currently, duty rates are 16.5 per cent on cigarettes; booze duty varies depending on alcohol content, but it's around £7.90 per 70cl bottle of spirits, £2 per 75cl bottle of wine and 43p per pint of beer.

ARE THOSE POSH CHOCS REALLY A BARGAIN?

Not necessarily. A lot of what you'll see at the airport can be found cheaper at supermarkets or outlet malls. Those Guylian seashells, for example, actually cost £2 more for a 250g box at World Duty Free (found in 21 airports and Eurotunnel; worlddutyfree.com) than at Tesco.

SO WHAT IS A GOOD BUY AT THE AIRPORT?

Luxury goods and posh brands of cosmetics and booze are rarely discounted on the high street, so find them on sale airside, and you're quids in. A 100ml bottle of Stella McCartney perfume, for instance, costs £55.10 at Manchester airport (shopbiza.com) – £13.40 less than at Boots. Bag some Prada Linea Rossa sunglasses for £150 at Durham Tees Valley airport (alphaairportshopping.com) and you'll pay £30 less than at John Lewis. Or pick up two one-litre bottles of Johnnie Walker Double Black Label from World Duty Free for £60, and say cheers to paying £26 less than at Waitrose. This isn't a hard and fast rule, so it's worth doing a quick check on the internet before you buy.

WHAT ABOUT IN-FLIGHT SHOPPING – ISN'T THAT AN EVEN BETTER DEAL?

Airports charge extremely high rents for retail space, which gives airline in-flight magazines the edge when it comes to prices. On Thomas Cook Airlines (flythomascook.com), we found a deal on Bombay Sapphire offering two one-litre bottles for £26. At World Duty Free, we'd have paid £35.98, and a hefty £54 at Asda. And Virgin Atlantic (virgin-atlantic.com) sells 400 Silk Cut on its planes for £38 – £20 less than



at Gatwick airport. Beyond alcohol and cigarettes, the savings are less impressive. For instance, Jo Malone Lime Basil Mandarin Cologne is £61 for 100ml on Virgin planes – just £1.80 cheaper than at World Duty Free, although still £17 less than at John Lewis. Once again, you'll want to check prices first, though; when we compared prices for Ultrasun 20 Sports 200ml sunscreen, it was £18 on BA (highlifeshop.com), £18.80 at World Duty Free – but only £15 at John Lewis.

HOW CAN I MAKE SURE IT'S A DEAL?

Take a look at Dutyfreeaddict.com; it shows prices for popular products at airport duty-free stores around the world, so you'll know whether to shop on your outbound or return flight. It doesn't cover everything, though, so also use Google Shopping, which will quickly show you if an item is cheaper online. If you're organised, you can see what the current duty-free bargains are before you even leave home by going to the websites mentioned above or your airport or airline's website (click on the shopping link). Otherwise, you'll have to use your smartphone to access the internet.

A LOT OF WHAT YOU'LL SEE AT THE AIRPORT CAN BE FOUND CHEAPER AT SUPERMARKETS**WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH LIQUIDS?**

If you're taking a non-stop flight you don't have to worry about your duty-free buys. But if you're going to be transiting through another airport or have a layover, don't risk buying booze or big bottles of fragrance/liquids as they could well be taken off you, and your bags will be in the hold so you won't be able to pack them away.

HOW DO I AVOID PAYING FOR EXCESS BAGGAGE?

See if the airport offers a collect-on-return service, whereby you can buy on your way out, and find your swag ready to collect when you come back. Heathrow (heathrowairport.com) has an app, so you can even order from the sofa on your mobile or iPad before you go. ■