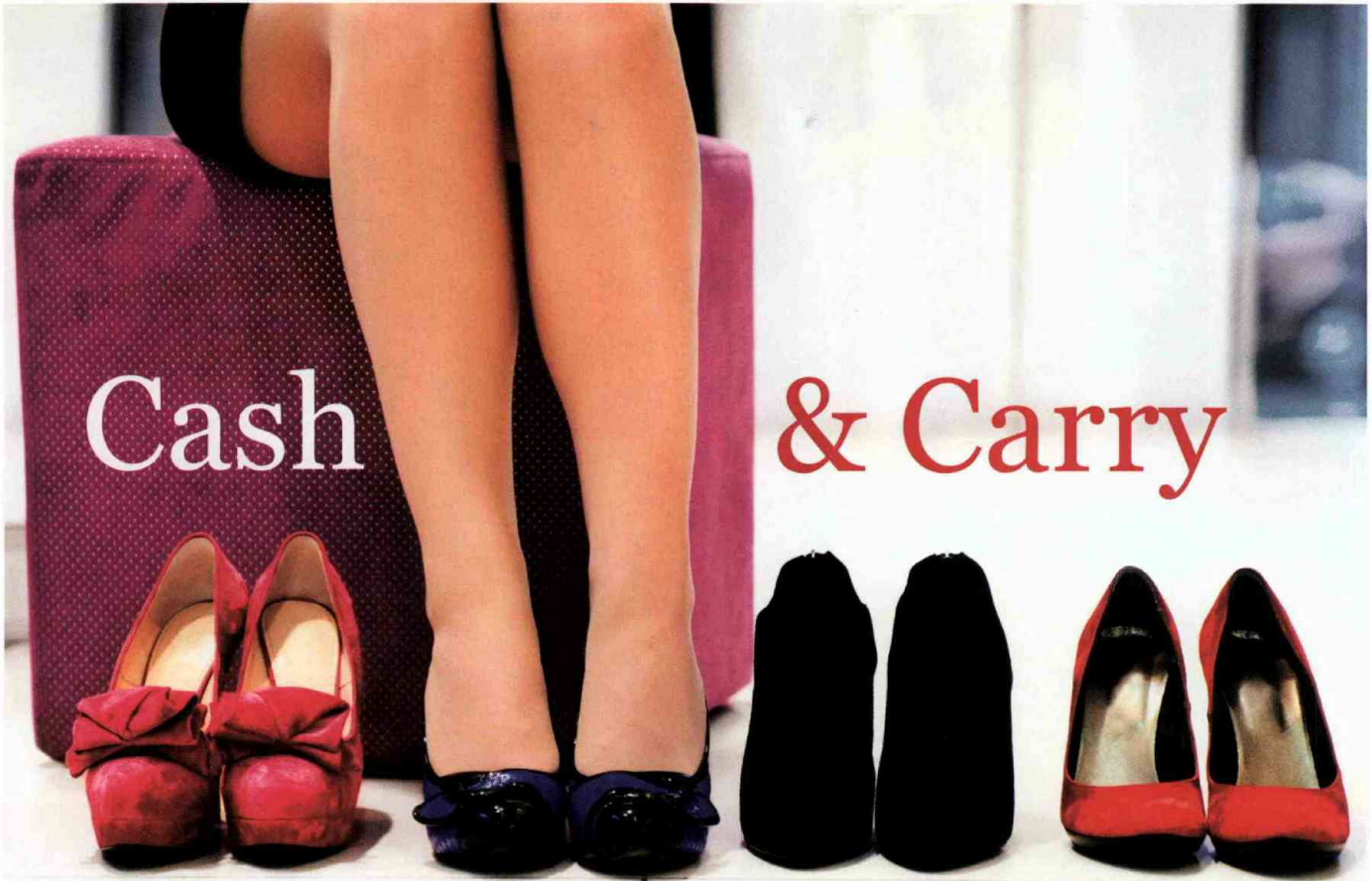


shopping: usa



*Once a last-minute scramble for souvenir t-shirts and cheap electronics at the end of a trip, shopping is now a USA holiday pre-requisite that requires knowledge and planning, says **Laura Gelder***

It is little wonder that New York remains the favourite shopping destination for Brits. After all, it's a city where the big stores are tourist destinations in their own right – just look at Bloomingdale's, with its famous brown carrier bags or Macy's Christmas Grotto.

Fashionistas will find designer heaven in Madison Avenue and the Meatpacking district. On glamorous Fifth Avenue there are department stores like Saks Fifth Avenue and Bergdorf Goodman, with famous jewellers Tiffany & Co. and Van Cleef & Arpels also glittering temptingly.

Fifth Avenue isn't all about high-end though and high street fans will find names like Niketown, Abercrombie & Fitch and Anthropologie.

Bargain hunters will enjoy battling the crowds at Century 21, which has stores across NYC. And for vintage finds, recommend Greenwich Village or Brooklyn Flea, a weekend vintage market.

Virgin Holidays' USA Product Development

Executive, Alice Nevins-Ramessur, suggests an alternative to the Big Apple: "Boston is where clued-up shopaholics are now heading," she says. "At just 6.25% the city's sales tax is lower than most others and there's none at all to pay on clothes and footwear under \$175. Recommend Newby Street for the best boutiques."

Philadelphia is just over an hour from New York (via Amtrak) and offers tax-free shopping at the east coast's largest mall – the King of Prussia. This monster out-of-towner boasts seven department stores and more than 400

"For shopping I'd recommend Philadelphia, Atlantic City and Louisiana because they are tax free. Plus, Bloomington's Mall of America is huge and

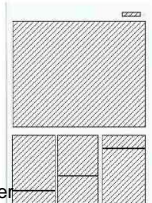
an attraction in its own right!"

PHILIPPA WESTWOOD, MARKETING MANAGER, AMERICA AS YOU LIKE IT

shops and restaurants. Back in the city, there is a Macy's, 60 high street shops at Liberty Place and, for luxury items, the historic Bellevue building has a collection of designer brands like Ralph Lauren and Tiffany & Co.

Shoppers in Chicago head to the Magnificent Mile, the city's best-known shopping shrine and the home of its most iconic buildings – it even has a shopping festival at the end of August.

More 'left field' is the Wicker Park/Bucktown area of the city, where dozens of



boutiques sell everything from jewellery to clothes, crafts and antiques.

California is a shopper's paradise. Quirky San Francisco is well known for its thrift stores and ▶



▶ indie boutiques which line Chestnut, Union and Fillmore streets. But mainstream shoppers will find the usual chains and high-end shops scattering Union Square and a Westfield mall with Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom department stores.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles has the LA Fashion District, where samples go at 40-70% off retail prices along with fakes and independent designers. This huge area is set over 90 blocks and comprises 1,000 stores. But for the ultimate in LA bling, Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills is the place to be seen.

According to Forbes, unlikely Houston is the number one shopping destination in the US, with 16,938 retail locations and 54 shopping centres. Elsewhere in Texas, Austin is the place to go for independent labels and quirky boutiques.

In tourist Mecca Florida, Miami is a safe bet for shoppers, with discount stores downtown, one-of-a-kind shops in Lincoln Road, designer boutiques in Coral Gables and malls that include the country's third largest in Aventura and Sawgrass Mills, which is actually three malls in one.

However, the largest mall in America is located in Bloomington, Minnesota. Not the most sought-after holiday destination perhaps, but it is close to Mid-West hub Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport, and has 520 stores and an indoor amusement park.

Outlet malls are found all across the US. They sell well-known brands at discount prices (at least 20% off the RRP), because the merchandise has a small flaw, or because they are so 'last-season'.

Some outlet malls offer special discounts which are often free for agents but add considerable value for holidaymakers. "We have just done a shop and spa package for the Mall of America, with accommodation at the Radisson Blu, a coupon book and a tour of the Barbie Dreamhouse Experience" says Philippa Westwood, Marketing Manager for America As You like It.

America's Premier Shopping Places has a collection of shopping centres located in cities including Las Vegas, Chicago and Miami.



Previous page: A Chanel store in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles. Above: American Apparel is a popular brand; Newport Beach, California is home to the Fashion Island Mall.

Agents can get a 'Premier Passport' for their clients, filled with shopping and dining savings, special offers and amenities.

Meanwhile, Premium Outlets has over 65 outlets throughout the USA and offers the trade Shop & Stay packages at most, with special room rates, shopping discounts and free gifts. There is even commission available on transportation to some of its stores.

Shop America offers a range of add-on shopping tours and add-on packages in and around cities across the USA, often including discount coupons and transport. It also has useful rundowns on individual cities' shopping scenes on its website. It gives 10% commission to non-contracted tour operators and travel agents who use the promo code TravelTrade at the check-out.

What's new

 **Packages:** SIMON Shopping Destinations has teamed up with Loews Hotels to offer 'Complimentary Personal Shopper Service' package for guests at hotels near the King of Prussia Mall, Philadelphia; Fashion Valley, San Diego; and Dadeland Mall, Miami. The package offers shoppers a preliminary consultation, with a two-hour shopping trip free (additional time is \$70 per hour), free 'Style Pass' store savings and a tote bag plus free samples.

The Shop & Dine Las Vegas programme package is worth \$39.99 for two but agents can purchase it at a net rate and pass on hundreds of shopping offers across venues like Grand Canal Shoppes, as well as dining discounts, access to a free shopping shuttle, VIP passes to Tao nightclub and Lavo lounge and a \$25 restaurant.com card. ▶

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“Time a break to coincide with Black Friday in November – but tell your client to be savvy with brands. Where as Abercrombie & Fitch and Apple will have great savings, British brands like Jack Wills are not as cheap”

ALICE NEVINS-RAMESSUR, USA PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVE, VIRGIN HOLIDAYS