

Spending spree

Selling Stateside shopping breaks is more lucrative than you might think, finds Laura French

As I counted up my purchases and took a peek at my now-empty purse, I realised it was probably time to stop shopping.

I was at Premium Outlets North in Las Vegas, feeling the effects of a rather indulgent spree – one that would have made even Rebecca Bloomwood in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* do a double-take. Still, I'd managed to snag four bags' worth of brand-name goods for a snippet of the price I'd have


paid back in Blighty. So this is what draws so many Brits to the US for shopping each year.

Rebecca Evans, senior marketing executive at Funway Holidays, agrees. "The first and most obvious thing to say is that US

labels are cheaper in the US than the UK – even Gap works out cheaper," she says.

It's also the fact the staff are among the friendliest you'll ever encounter, several of the states are tax-free, and the larger malls –

complete with bowling alleys, aquariums and plenty more – are so all-encompassing they'd rival entire cities back home. It's little surprise Expedia recently put New York and Los Angeles in its top three cities in the world for shopping. And within the US itself, it's those destinations – alongside Scottsdale, Las Vegas and Florida – that get the most UK shoppers, according to Carrier.

But it's not just clients who can benefit from all this: travel agents can cash in too, with commissionable 

TOP TIP

Pack an empty fold-down bag into your suitcase to bring back extra purchases, or pick up a suitcase out there





USAirtours offers a three-night Las Vegas Shop & Stay package from £449, staying at the Flamingo Hotel & Casino, with Thomas Cook flights from London (Manchester £49 extra), including a Simon Shopping Destinations Savings Passport and welcome bag, for travel January 1 to March 20, 2017. usairstours.co.uk

Gold Medal offers a shopping break to Las Vegas from £539, including three nights at Caesars Palace and Norwegian flights for departures from November 21 to December 5. goldmedal.co.uk

Funway Holidays offers a week at the Anabella Hotel in Anaheim, opposite Disneyland Resort and 10 minutes from The Outlets at Orange, from £765. The price is based on two adults and two kids under 12, and includes American Airlines flights from Heathrow on August 17. funway4agents.co.uk

RIGHT:
Las Vegas North Premium Outlets

BELOW:
Michael Kors



➔ Shop & Stay packages and transport available across the country. According to Carrier, the number of people booking pure shopping holidays to the US has fallen over recent years, but tagging a shopping trip on to longer holidays is still a great way to sell packages. It's just a case of knowing how to approach it, and who to target.

▶ SAVE: BAG A BARGAIN

The whole country is a bargain-hunter's paradise: Simon Shopping Destinations alone has 112 Premium Outlets, each offering discounts of up to 65% on big-name brands.

There are two in Las Vegas and, as suggested by my rather liberal spree, the North centre is really quite impressive. Decked out like a mini



Levi's offers jeans from just \$40 and discounts of up to 70% can be found across other stores at Outlets at Orange

village, its 170 stores span the whole spectrum – from Calvin Klein and Banana Republic through to Marc Jacobs and Michael Kors. There's also an Armani Outlet, where I was saving myself as much as 90% on the original price; it might have been last-season stock, but unless I bump into *The Devil Wears Prada's* Miranda Priestly any time soon, I'm not sure anyone will notice.

If clients are going to New York, direct them to Woodbury Common Premium Outlets, home to more designer outlets than anywhere else in the world. There are a number of commissionable packages available. Funway Holidays offers a tour there as one of its 'Shop 'Til You Drop in New York' packages (from £30), while Attraction World and Do Something Different offer excursions with transport from New York City and discount vouchers (from £29 and £30).

There are savings to be made for the whole family in Florida, home to two Premium Outlets and a Florida Keys Outlet Centre. But if clients are keen to head farther afield, highlight the benefits of shopping in a state with no

sales tax – Montana, New Hampshire, Oregon and Delaware – or places like Louisiana and Texas which refund the sales tax to tourists in shopping malls and airports.

For those looking to make even further savings at any of the Premium Outlets, suggest the VIP Passport, a coupon booklet that clients can get for free if they sign up to the VIP Club online, or buy on-site for \$10. It's worth the effort, especially if – like me – they're looking to make a fair few purchases. premiumoutlets.com/vip

▶ SPEND: BRING ON THE FUN

For clients willing to fork out a little more, recommend some of the more entertainment-focused malls. Among the best is Outlets at Orange in Anaheim, Los Angeles.

Located just four miles from Disneyland Resort, it's an ideal add-on for clients heading out to see Mickey and co, and there's a good bus service (the ART: \$5 for a day pass) which connects the two together.

The village is home to a cinema, bowling alley, skate park and high ropes centre, all of which might appeal to families with children or partners less keen to spend a whole day shopping. Not that the fun's only for the younger ones; I spent two solid hours playing video games in the quirky, luminescent Dave & Busters, and I certainly wasn't the only big kid there.

It's a winner on the shopping front too, with Levi's offering jeans from just \$40 and discounts of up to 70% found across its other stores. And there's ➔



PICTURE: JACK YONN

RIGHT: Indoor rollercoaster, Mall of America

FAR RIGHT: The Forum Shops, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas



ASK THE EXPERT



Edna Hischer,
Europe travel trade representative,
Simon Shopping Destinations

"Shopping is such an integral part of any holiday experience to the US, so we always encourage travel agents to bring shopping into their sales conversation and into the booking process. Travellers are looking for recommendations and tips shopping-wise – especially those who have not been to the US before and are not aware of the incredible shopping to be had. By highlighting the benefits and savings to be made at Simon Shopping Destinations, it helps agents confirm that booking, plus the customer will appreciate the advice, making them more likely to come back to the agent to book their next holiday."

traveltrade.simon.com

→ an expansion in the pipeline, with a host of shops due to be added over the coming months.

Beyond LA, Sawgrass Mills in Fort Lauderdale is a good bet for family fun and mid-range shopping. It features a 23-screen cinema, Imax and more, and is so popular it ranks as Florida's second-biggest tourist attraction. Meanwhile, in Bloomington there's the Mall of America, the largest centre in the country, where fashion shows, celebrity book signings, workshops and performances rub shoulders with the likes of a comedy house, museum and indoor theme park. Who said shopping was just about shops?

► SPLURGE: SPLASH OUT

If all that's not exciting enough and you've got clients looking to flash a little more cash, there's only one thing for it: the infamous Las Vegas Strip. This sparkling, neon world of extravagance is bursting at the seams with designer stores, and wandering through The Forum Shops at Caesars Palace – admiring the Trevi Fountain and elaborate spiralled escalators – felt like another world altogether.

As one of the highest-end malls on the Strip, The Forum is a good destination for clients seeking an exclusive, behind-closed-doors shopping experience, and the Dior there has just opened a small spa room where customers can get a mini-facial.

Beyond that there's Crystal Shops – an ultra-luxe, glittering complex that's home to the country's flagship Louis Vuitton store. And here's a secret:



clients planning on spending big in the store can book an appointment to a little-known James Turrell exhibition held in one of the back rooms.

Meanwhile, at the Louis Vuitton store in the Bellagio, there's a terrace where high-spending shoppers can arrange a private viewing of the famous fountain show, drink in hand. I managed to get a sneak peek – and as water sprayed

all around in time with the soothing, powerful music in a mesmerising spectacle, I just knew I couldn't have been anywhere but Vegas.

It's not all limited to Sin City though. Over in LA, the Carrier Concierge can arrange for clients to be shown around by stylists from local personal shopping service LaLaLuxe (from \$400 per hour).

And back in New York, several companies offer private limo excursions to upgrade a visit to Woodbury Premium Outlets (\$699 for six hours with All Occasion Limo). There's even a private jet service available from Manhattan with Liberty Helicopters – which might come in handy if, like me, clients overdo it and need a little extra room for the bags.

lalaluxe.com

alloccasionlimo.com

libertyhelicopter.com

Shopping news

Orlando Premium Outlets has introduced a complimentary Shopper Shuttle to transport guests from key hotels to Orlando Premium Outlets Vineland and International. The 50-passenger vehicle runs one pick-up each morning and a return each day from hotels including The Floridian Hotel & Suites, Crowne Plaza Universal Orlando and The Palms Hotel & Villages.

Fans of Demi Lovato and Nick Jonas could take part in a meet-and-greet

with the singers at Premium Outlets including Woodbury Common, Desert Hills, Orlando International, Las Vegas North and Phoenix. To enter, visit simon.com/vipevents.

Passengers transiting through New York can take advantage of new Shop-Over packages. The Mills at Jersey Gardens is close to New York Newark airport and served by half-hourly shuttles, while JFK is less than half an hour from the newly expanded Roosevelt Field mall.