



Clockwise from right: Bodycare products derived from local ingredients are some of the variety of gift ideas from ThaiCraft Fair Trade; wrap yourself in this eye-catching cotton shawl from Ma Té Sai; a decorative pot from Threads of Life Gallery

their shopping experience will be shaped. Here's how to shop mindfully.

AT WHAT PRICE?

Pay a fair price. You'll encourage the maker to continue producing unique items and the shopkeeper to stay in business. You don't want stores selling cookie-cutter products.

You should pay more than a local. You probably earn more than most people in a developing country. Your contribution will go a long way towards boosting the local economy.

Negotiate only if you're serious about buying. Many locals believe you bring bad luck if you bargain without making a purchase. Consider how much that last dollar or two will mean to the seller's household.

BUY FROM THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Don't buy from kids. Buying postcards and other items from children doesn't benefit them. Kids should be in school, studying or playing, not working.

Avoid aggressive touts and sellers. Don't patronise a store where the shopkeeper accosts you and insists you buy a cold drink or scarf. Make a point of shopping elsewhere, and tell him why. If no one buys from pushy sellers, they'll change their tactics.

Buy fair trade. You'll know the makers get a decent wage and that they don't have to leave their village to work. Shopping at fair-trade stores also eliminates the hassle of researching to find out what is a fair price and whether the product is what it claims to be.



WHERE TO SHOP

Luang Prabang's main street. You'll find intricately woven scarves, Hmong reverse-embroidered bags, and jewellery made from unexploded ordnance (explosive weapons). Everything is laid out orderly and there's no sales pressure. If you do buy, you're rewarded with the luck-bringing ritual of the seller brushing all her goods with the money you've given her, in the hope of future sales.

Threads of Life Gallery, Ubud supports Indonesia's rich textile arts and fine crafts like pottery and carvings. threadsoflife.com

Ma Té Sai, Laos. Buy bath and beauty products made from locally sourced ingredients,

beautiful Lao-style jackets, dresses, even homemade honey. matesai.com

ThaiCraft Fair Trade brings together handcrafted products – from decor to exquisite jewellery – from the village communities of Thailand. thaicraft.org

Craft Link, Hanoi. Pick up embroidered table runners, scarves, woven bags, among other items made by Vietnamese traditional craftsmen. craftlink.com.vn

 SilkAir flies to Luang Prabang, Hanoi and Denpasar. For flight frequencies, see SilkAir Postcards on page 57

Shopping in Southeast Asia

It's easy to be dazzled by the region's colourful, exotic wares – after all, Asia is a shopper's paradise. But is your souvenir the real deal and one that supports the community?

WORDS JOHANNA READ

Whether you're looking for clothing, homeware, antiques, jewellery, or art, you're sure to find shops overflowing with them. But there are challenges lurking within the bounty.

Product uniqueness is fast disappearing. Pushy shopkeepers selling the exact same wares call out "You buy! You buy!" If you do stop to browse, staff stand close to you, thinking they're being helpful, even though you feel uncomfortable and pressured into buying. Most travellers want souvenirs that are authentic to the destination they're visiting. The product may indicate 'silk' or '100% cotton', but there's a good chance the claims are false. That cushion may be lovely, but if it is factory-made in China rather than handmade by the lady selling it, is it worth buying?

The decisions you make as a shopper help determine not only whether you bring home a unique local handicraft, but also what future visitors will find and how



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