

SHOPPING SECRETS DISCOVER FRANCE'S BEST BROCANTEES

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'Aim for smaller cities that organise flea markets every week. You might have to hunt a bit harder to find hidden gems but they will be far cheaper'

to be discreet and not show too much enthusiasm, otherwise prices tend to rise.'

The prices vary depending on what you are looking to buy and where you buy it. For example the Parisian flea markets, known as *les marchés aux puces*, such as Les Puces de Saint-Ouen, command higher prices than the *foires à tout*, which are much more competitively priced. Nicolas Martin, co-founder of the website fleamarketinsiders.com, agrees that location is important when considering price points.

THE THRILL OF THE FIND

'Aim for smaller cities that organise flea markets every week,' he advises. 'You might have to hunt a bit harder to find hidden gems but they will be far cheaper. I've always found great antique and designer items at them, unexpectedly, for almost nothing. Some of my finds include a big military chest from the 19th century for €70 (£58), a 1950s clothes hanger for €15 (£12) and original Fornasetti plates for €10 (£8).'

One of Sharon's top tips is to make sure you leave space in your car for transporting items home as there is nothing more disappointing than finding something you love and not being able to take it with you. Smaller items can be easily posted and Sharon says French post offices sell flat-rate pre-paid boxes with tracking. But for larger items the best solution is to have them shipped, or, if you can, arrange storage and return on another trip with an empty car.

The bug of *brocante* shopping is addictive and the thrill of the find is something that never wears off. After more than two decades in France Sharon still gets excited by going to the flea markets: 'Buying is a real pleasure here. People still love to shop in France because they enjoy the whole experience of buying in small villages and stopping for a good lunch en route.'

So, the next time you're driving over to France leave a little room, and when you see a sign for a *vide-greniers* make sure you stop as you never know what you might find. ■

DONE FRANCE ALREADY?



Nicolas Martin, co-founder of Flea Market Insiders, recommends some other European destinations for second-hand shoppers

'If you want to venture further afield in Europe, there are many places to go besides France. Italy, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands offer a huge variety of very decent flea markets along with antiques and design stores. The type of items sold will of course vary from one country to another but all of these will provide you with good options for industrial design, vintage clothing and antiques.'

Flea market hunters looking for up-and-coming destinations should consider Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland. Austria, because of its central position in Europe and its proximity to Eastern European countries, is another one not to overlook. If you only have time to visit one place there, my top recommendation would be Vienna, or Linz. Flea markets there offer a nice mix of items and you can expect to find interesting pieces from all the nearby Eastern European countries.'

fleamarketinsiders.com

RIGHT The daily flea market at Place du Jeu de Balle in Brussels

BELOW Encants Vells flea market at Plaça de les Glories Catalanes in the Spanish city of Barcelona



FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The open-air street market in Arles is the biggest in the region; if an item catches your eye, be prepared to barter for it; you'll find all sorts at a *brocante*; if you're after bigger items like chairs, leave enough room in your car to transport it home with you!