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Deals & Steals

By Lisa Arcella

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Wealthy European's have been keeping a secret. And it's the best kind of secret - one about shopping.

For years the continent's well-heeled and the well known like Elizabeth Hurley, Victoria Beckham, Stella McCartney, Mick Jagger, and Gemma Kidd have been flocking to luxury shopping villages just outside of nine major cities.

Europe's Chic Outlet Shopping centers are certainly not the place to find the discounted \$10.95 t-shirts Americans might associate with outlet shopping. This is the place to find brands like Christian Lacroix Ordning & Reda, Ballantyne Cashmere Manfield-Bowen, Dior, Burberry, Armani and many other luxury brands at 30 to 70% off the original retail price. So even with that much of a discount, you certainly won't find bargain basement prices. What you often will find are high-end designer labels, some from last season's collections, but all with significant savings.

The shopping villages can be found less than an hour away from London, Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Milan, Brussels, Frankfurt, Munich and Dublin and are often found in historic or picturesque locations. So after your pocketbook has taken a sufficient beating there's always something else to do. For example, La Vallee Village is located about 35 minutes from the center of Paris and not far from the Champagne region and Frankfurt's



Wertheim Village is on the Romantic Road with its Bavarian castles and the region surrounding Maasmechelen Village, outside of Brussels appeals to serious foodies with Vivendum, One Michelin Star restaurant and Comme Chez Soi Three-Michelin Stars.

And even with a weak dollar, the deals are still good on high-end items. During a recent visit to London's Bicester Village (close to Oxford University), a Dior cocktail dress that was originally £3160 (\$6400) sold for £722 (\$1463), a Dior brown suede saddle bag £393 (\$796) was priced £230 (\$466), Jimmy Choo teal patent boots were £595 (\$1200) and sold £450 (\$912), a Celine swimsuit that was priced at £170 (\$344) sold for £78 (\$158) and a Mulberry Blenheim bag at £395 (\$800) - £197 (\$399).

Everyone loves a bargain, even Europeans who can afford the best says Desirée Bollier, CEO of parent company Value Retail tells Luxury Web, but its also about the style those deals are presented that make this a very different shopping experience for many foreign tourists.

"The scale is noticeably different. Visiting any of our Outlet Villages in Europe, an American traveller would notice that the Village is smaller than a usual "Mall" and it has a European personality and culture, with Village architecture that is particular and reflective of that city," she explains. Brands also include some well-known American names like DKNY that are hugely popular with European and Asian shoppers. But there are also exclusive local products that can be difficult to find in the States. Pedro del Hierro, Antonio Miro, Camper, Loewe are some great names to note at La Roca Village in Barcelona for example.

And even though she is meant to remain objective, Bollier does admit to having her favorites. "Columbo Cashmere," she says with a swoon of desire. "I think its one of the best kept secrets at Fidenza Village in Milan. They manufacture for the worlds luxury brands and their 3 ply cashmere is really to die for."

Here's a brief overview of what to do and see at the various villages, for more information and directions from city centers check out www.chicoutletshopping.com

LONDON-Bicester Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: Pringle of Scotland, Waterford Wedgwood, Gieves & Hawkes and Salvatore Ferramo.

What to see nearby: Stratford-Upon-Avon, Oxford, Blenheim Palace

Spa: Barnsley House in Gloucestershire

Restaurant: The Beetle and Wedge in Moulsoford

Hotel: Malmaison in Oxford

PARIS-La Vallee Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: Givenchy, Chantelle, Celine and Zadig & Voltaire

What to see nearby: Le Chateau de Ferrieres, Les Caves de Moet & Chandon, Disneyland Paris

Spa: Spa Caudalie in Paris

Restaurant: La Vielle Auberge in Villeneuve-le-Comte

Hotel: Chateau les Crayeres in Reims

MADRID-Las Rozas Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: Tag Heuer, Loewe, Versace and Hackett.

What to see nearby: Prado Museum, Segovia Cathedral, Casino Gran Madrid

Spa: Spa Connection in Madrid

Restaurant: El Cenador de Salvador in Moralzarzal

Hotel: Gran Hotel Las Rozas in Las Rozas

BARCELONA-La Roca Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: La Perla, Adolfo Dominguez, Zegna and Burberry

What to see nearby: Dali Theatre Museum, Museu Picasso, Sagrada Familia

Spa: Hotel Termes La Garriga in Barcelona
Restaurant: El Raco De Can Fabes in Sant Celoni
Hotel: Mas De Torrent Hotel in Girona

MILAN-Fidenza Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: Furla, Castelbajac, Coccinelle and Trussardi Jeans
What to see nearby: Castles of Parma and Teatro Magnani
Spa: Salsomaggiore Terme in Salsomaggiore
Restaurant: Stella D'Oro in Soragna
Hotel: Locanda Del Lupo in Soragna

DUSSELDORF BRUSSELS -Maasmechelen Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: St. Emile, Villeroy and Boch, Barbour and Rena Lange
What to see nearby: Modemuseum, Antwerps and Wijkasteel Genoels-Elderen
Spa: Aquamarijn in Lanaken
Restaurant: Hostellerie Vivendum in Dilsen-Stokkem
Hotel: Hostellerie La Butte Aux Bois in Lanaken

FRANKFURT-Werheim Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: Armani, Strenesse, Gant and Baldessarini
What to see nearby: Wurzburg and Goethe-Haus in Frankfurt
Spa: Vital Resort in Aschaffenburg
Restaurant: Weinstein Restaurant and Wine Bar in Wurzburg
Hotel: Schloss Steinburg in Wurzburg

MUNICH-Ingolstadt Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: Strenesse, Bogner, Helly Hansen and Miss Sixty
What to see nearby: The Danube Gorge, Naturpark Altmuhtal and the Princely Palace of Thurn and Taxis
Spa: Marc Auriel Spa in Bad Gogging
Restaurant: Residenz Heinz Winkler in Aschau im Chiemgau
Hotel: Mandarin Oriental in Munich

DUBLIN-Kildare Village

Brands to keep an eye out for: Regine, Tse Cashmere, Myla and Coast
What to see nearby: Curragh Racecourse and the Dublin City Gallery
Spa: The K Club in Straffan
Restaurant: The Mill at Lyons in Celbridge
Hotel: The Four Seasons in Dublin

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