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Wildlife Souvenirs

Be careful when you buy articles made from animals and plants or when you purchase live, wild animals to bring back as pets. You want to exercise caution and discretion when transporting items made out of elephant tusks (ivory), leather made from crocodile skin or other wild animal hide or fur from exotic cat breeds - these cannot legally be brought into American soil. You will only end up on the losing end of things, as your wildlife souvenirs would be confiscated by authorities, and you may have to face stiff penalties and sanctions as bringing these items Stateside is considered a crime. Make sure that the wildlife products (or wildlife) you plant to buy can be legally transported into the United States.

Glazed Ceramics

Beware of purchasing glazed ceramic ware abroad. Lead poisoning is an imminent danger that can be caused by food and beverages served in glazed ceramics of inferior quality. In most cases, you can be assured of a good quality product if it is made by a well-known international firm, but there really is no exact way to determine the absolute safety of these products. Authorities from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration suggest that when purchasing glazed ceramics overseas, they should be immediately tested for lead release at a reputable laboratory once you return home, or be merely used as decoration.

A Warning on Antiques

When buying antiques abroad, you have to be careful as some countries regard antiques as a national treasure not to be tampered with. In some countries, customs authorities seize illegally purchased antiques without compensation, and they may also levy fines on the purchaser. Many law-abiding Americans have been arrested and charged for not having a permit when purchasing antiques. Many national treasures like these are sold as replicas by street vendors - and many a tourist has been nabbed by eager authorities who think they had actually made an illegal purchase.

Protect yourself. In countries where antiques are important, document your purchases as reproductions, if that is the case, or, if they are authentic, secure the necessary export permit. Your first stop would usually be the country's national museum if you wish to secure one of these permits or documents. Seek the aid of a reputable dealer for additional information, or to get an export permit. And you may also want to consult the country's tourist office for any questions you may have about purchasing antiques. And when all else fails, the nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate should have the answers for you in their Consular Section. They will also be the first people to turn to if you may be unlucky enough to get into trouble for making an illegal purchase of antiques. And when it comes to local laws, consular officers know everything there is to know.

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