



THE WORLD'S BEST SHOPPING DISTRICTS

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Where to go for the good stuff

So you're in a major international city and you want to locate the top shopping area, either because you need respite from intense sightseeing, you want to pick up gifts to take home, or you have the urge to refresh your wardrobe. Don't we all want the scarf from Rome, the shirt from Paris, or the silk suit from Bangkok? We also want visually arresting windows to pass by, and atmospheric cafes and restaurants for breaks.

However, finding the shopping district with a combination of high quality independent stores and chic international chains can often be a challenge. As to costs, however painful the economic downturn is for many, for some it's an opportunity to find good value at reduced prices. Here are 16 key streets or squares right in the thick of the best shops, galleries, and restaurants.

For a hot design district with a friendlier exchange rate, check out Buenos Aires. The city mixes Parisian chic with a casual, rockier feel, and is a great place to score edgy menswear and leather goods. Women have long flocked to Avenida Alvear in the Recoleta section. But in order to go beyond large international labels, you'll need to wander through Palermo Soho. Although there are standout



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Rome, Italy

Via Condotti, just off the Piazza Di Spagna, is the showcase for Italy's sleek and cutting-edge fashion and style. Get away from the crowds and weave through the wider side streets filled with independent boutiques, outdoor cafes, and restaurants. For a quiet moment, slip into the very Roman Café Greco, a veritable art salon, right on the Via Condotti, for tea and pastries.

stores such as shoe-mecca Mishka or Sabater Hermanos—a designer bath goods shop decked out with cute beakers and lab flasks—the fun is in wandering the side streets.

An even friendlier exchange rate makes for guilt-free sprees in Bangkok, Thailand, where shopping is a national pastime. There is a market, boutique or mall to peruse at any hour of the day, and it's nearly impossible to walk down the street without being tempted by small trinkets, local crafts or quirky jewelry. If you're feeling energetic, throw yourself into the Chatuchak Weekend Market, which has as many as 9,000 stalls organized thematically—from vintage clothes to pets to spices. However, the real finds are in the Siam neighborhood, which features everything from massive malls to miniscule boutiques. Go here to find the perfect pair of jeans at one of the all-denim stores. Find a pair you like and have them hemmed and tailored while you wait.

Sometimes shopping is as much about the experience as it is about your individual finds. That's definitely the case in Morocco, where maze-like souks are an exercise in cultural immersion. Hire a guide to take you through the medina in Marrakech. Although you should steel yourself for pushy sales pitches and fevered bargaining, the payoffs can be rich. Expect to find intricate hand-crafted jewelry, rugs and woven bags. But much like a Chanel suit, when it comes to planning a shopping trip, you can never go wrong with the classics: Paris, London, New York and Los Angeles. Although Paris used to be the destination for high-end designers, the shopping



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Buenos Aires, Argentina

For chic, elegant boutiques and high couture chains amid small palaces and top hotels—and at very affordable prices—check out Avenida Alvear, known as the street for fashion and art. For hip, yet fashionable designers search the maze of boutiques in Palermo Soho.



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Bangkok, Thailand

The majestic Siam Paragon, located directly across from Siam Station on the BTS Skytrain line, has become Bangkok's newest shopping area. It has every international designer you can name, plus top floors with cineplexes and a bowling alley. Check with your hotel concierge for tailors who make Thai clothing for men and women within 24 hours.

landscape changed as the dollar lost traction against the euro and prices went sky-high. But with the economic downturn, even high fashion may now be affordable. "What Americans should really look for are the fabulous weekend markets," In Style magazine Market Director Toby Tucker Peters says, "You can still walk the Avenue Montaigne for a look at the opulent Gucci, Prada and Chanel stores, but much of their wares are available for much less in the States."

The exchange rate still poses an even bigger challenge in London. However, the country pioneered a trend that only recently caught on in the States: commissioning high-end designers develop lines for national chain stores. Stop at Top Shop in Covent Garden for Michael Nash and other design heavyweights.

New York City has many shopping areas, such as Fifth and Madison Avenues, but Soho has emerged as one of the most stylish. It's a quintessentially New York, but in-the-moment contemporary. Surprise: lots of elegant shops away from the hustle and bustle of Midtown plus colorful, artsy ones too. Take an afternoon to walk wide, tree-lined West Broadway from Grand to Houston. You'll find many fine international and American-owned design shops and fine little eating places. Branch out into the warren of streets between West Broadway and Broadway for more of the several hundred shops, galleries and cafes in Soho.



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Marrakesh, Morocco

Shopping in Morocco is all about the experience... and the bargaining. Set aside a full day to get lost in one of the Marrakech souks converging at the medina's nexus, Jemaâ el Fna, and then find more upscale boutiques in Gueliz. Though ceramics, leather goods and jewelry are all on offer, think bigger with one-of-a-kind furniture pieces that can easily be shipped home.



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Paris, France

For genuine Paris shopping start out on Avenue Montaigne and detour off Rue de Faubourg St Honoré near the Champs Elysees and the famous fancy hotels. Make sure to wander along rue Cambon, where Coco Chanel opened up her first store. Rue des Francs Bourgeois is a good route to take through the Marais area with its smaller boutiques, and you can veer off this main artery on to rue des Archives or rue Vielle de Temple. In the Left Bank, rue de Grenelle has beautiful smaller shops, luxury but more independent brands and French names.



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Berlin, Germany

The best hotels, shopping, museums, and culture come together right in the heart of Berlin at Friedrichstrasse. Check out its cross street Boulevard Unter den Linden for the juxtaposition of 18th and 19th century architecture and cutting edge shopping arcades: Galeries Lafayette of Paris and Quarter 206 with their top designers, and Quarter 205 for high quality gifts and souvenirs of clothing, textiles, and furniture. Weave in and out of the smaller side roads of Kurfuersdtendamn for a wide range of brasseries and bistros for meals or snacks.



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Copenhagen, Denmark

Copenhagen's Stroget, the longest European shopping street, is lined with a variety of shops. George Jensen Silver, Royal Copenhagen Porcelain, and Holmegaard Glassware are at Amagertorv, a square in the middle. Gronnegade quarter off the eastern end has contemporary design, hip and high end fashion, and cafes. However, for clothes way ahead of London or Paris shop at Kronprinsensgade.



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London, England

Hit the Covent Garden area for the best London shopping jaunts. The streets leading out from the square have a number of independent stores, designer shops, and high end chains. Mimes, jugglers, and singers perform here so you're apt to catch a show. Seven Dials, an old neighborhood just north with a contemporary flair, also has many independent, cool shops, especially heading up Neal Street and Neals Yard.



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Madrid, Spain

Ortega y Gasset Street, located in Barrio Salamanca, is also called the Milla de Oro, or Golden Mile, because of its luxury designer shops and boutiques. However, younger travelers may want to explore Fuencarral Street, a parallel to London's Soho, in the Malasaña neighborhood or hit the Rastro on Sundays for an immense flea market much like London's Portobello Road.



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Mexico City, Mexico

Luxury boutiques line Masaryk Avenue, named after a Czech president, in the trendy, dynamic Polanco neighborhood north of Chapultepec Park. Polanco also has many upscale art galleries and restaurants, and is close to a world renowned archeological museum. Make sure to visit Centro Artesanal La Ciudadela, Central Market, where hundreds of artisans from all over Mexico sell their crafts.



© Frances Roberts / Alamy

Soho, New York, N.Y.

Surprise: elegant shopping away from the hustle and bustle of Fifth and Madison Avenues. Walk down wide, tree-lined West Broadway from Grand to Houston, and you'll find many international and American owned design shops and fine little eating places. Branch out into the warren of streets between West Broadway and Broadway for more of the several hundred shops, galleries and cafes in Soho.



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Rome, Italy

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San Francisco, Calif.

Union Square, a large park in the middle of the hotel district, is surrounded by hundreds of shops, large and small, carrying fashion, home design, jewelry, art and antiques. In fact, San Francisco is home the only West Coast Bloomingdales! Since fashion and textiles are so big here, the DeYoung Museum in Golden Gate Park schedules regular exhibits of designers.



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Sydney, Australia

The Romanesque Queen Victoria Building, or QVB—a newly renovated focal point for shopping in downtown Sydney—is filled with elite designer shops and specialty stores. The adjacent Strand Arcade, a bit more edgy, also has a variety of stylish places.



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Tokyo, Japan

Ginza was long synonymous with the colored stone building with the clock tower at the intersection of the commercial district. Lately the area has been transformed into a luxury shopping area with avant-garde restaurants and post modern design and architecture. While wandering through the international boutiques, you'll also be getting a tour of buildings that have received architectural awards.



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Toronto, Canada

When in Toronto, head for the neighborhood of Bloor/Yorkville, where the European labels and upscale shopping can be found. The area begins at Yonge and Bloor Streets and spans west along Bloor Street past University Ave., and north to Davenport. Restaurants, spas, luxury hotels and the finest in Canadian galleries and museums are also located here.



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Vienna, Austria

The most fashionable shopping street in Vienna is Kaerntnerstrasse, a relatively quiet district which spreads out from the Vienna State Opera up to St. Stephans' Cathedral and then continues along the Graben to the much more commercial Kohlmarkt, also a pedestrian zone.