

→→A Brief Guide to Bargaining→→

WHEN TO BARGAIN

When you are feeling brave, you can practice your bargaining skills anywhere. If you ask for a deal, the worst that a shopkeeper can do is to say “no”, and who knows, he might just agree to one. Legally a price tag is simply an offer, and as a savvy consumer you are perfectly free to make a lower offer. Generally restaurants, pharmacies, department stores and multinational retail chains (Claire’s, H&M, Zara, etc.) will not adjust their prices simply because you ask them. However, in most European stores (even boutiques and shops with price tags on the clothes) a deal is there, just waiting for you to ask for it.

Bargaining is a terribly amusing game, and is an expected ritual at souvenir stands and jewelry stores. Also feel free to bargain in used book stores, curio shops, craft stores and of course in the market. In many countries it is considered an insult if you *don’t* bargain at a market. Most cities have a craft fair, bazaar or antique market, usually open on weekends. The best markets are generally not the ones set up for tourists, so if you can find one, visit an authentic market where nobody speaks English. Learn a few words in the local tongue and freely employ hand gestures. If you can’t speak the language, bargaining successfully will be an even greater triumph!

IN SHOPS

One must employ a certain measure of tact when bargaining in a store. You don’t want to look at the price tag of, say, a shirt, take it to the counter and state that although *they* think it is worth €20, *you* think it should be valued at considerably less and are willing to pay only €5 for it. A subtler and more successful technique to employ in a store is to ask the shopkeeper if he can “give you a deal”.

For example:

“If I buy two, will you give me a deal?”

“If I pay in cash, will you give me a deal?”

“If I tell other people at my hostel about your wonderful shop, will you give me a deal?”

In smaller stores the shopkeeper is often the owner and can certainly give you a deal if he sees fit to do so. As prices will be adjusted based upon the merchant's whim, it is wise to establish some sort of rapport with the shopkeeper before asking for your deal. Prior to discussing prices, I try to exchange a few pleasantries in the local language and admire the shop and its wares. Don't be shy. Try anything you can think of to get your deal, and just think, any money that you save today can be spent on more shopping tomorrow!

IN THE MARKET

- ➔ Don't show any interest in an item or ask its price unless you are willing to buy it. Remember, you are not in Canada. You cannot simply inquire the price of something and then walk away. Asking a price is an indication that you wish to start negotiations. I have asked a starting price and then, before I even knew what was happening, I had successfully bartered for an item that I had not even decided if I wanted to own!
- ➔ Concentrate your energy and money on a few larger items rather than on many small ones. What will you appreciate more when you return home, a shelf full of three-inch statuettes or a signed, original oil painting?
- ➔ Be willing to walk away. *Never* fall in love with an item unless you are willing to pay more for it. Sellers can sense the moment that you decide you *need* to have something and they will adjust the price accordingly. Just remember, why would someone try to convince you to buy something when he knows that you already want it?
- ➔ Bargaining is tiring and requires a lot of energy, especially for people coming from such a polite country as Canada. Make sure that you are not hungry. Stay hydrated and take rests.

- Master the currency exchange before you arrive at the market. You don't have to be perfect at converting currencies in your head, but being able to quickly figure out approximately how much someone is asking for an item is important. I come up with quick calculations: take away one zero and divide by three, or divide by two and add a little.
- Understand the money. Know what the different bills look like and how many zeros there should be. If you are unsure about the local currency, the seller will pick up on your weakness and try to squeeze extra money out of you. You don't want to get caught paying \$5000 for something when you only meant to pay \$50!
- Ask yourself if the object of your bartering is something that you truly want, and if the item is actually worth the price. Apply the following test: If you saw this item in a North American store, would you pick it up and consider buying it? If the answer is yes, then ask: If this item was selling in a shop for this price, would you buy it? If again the answer is yes, then start the bargaining. If the answer is no, then walk away without regret.
- Don't be shy or afraid to insult the item that you are buying. If the price the man is asking is higher than at the previous booth, say so. If you notice imperfections in the item, point them out. Remember, it is not your goal to please the seller. If you really wanted to do that, you would just pay his original asking price!
- Sellers will often give discounts if you purchase multiple things. You can often get a lower per-item price for two or three rather than just one article. Sometimes the multi-item discount is worth getting, and sometimes it is not. Remember, just because the price is slightly lower for two does not mean that you want to own the second one!

- If the seller refuses to agree to a price that you consider acceptable, ask him to throw in another small item or two. While you might not want to pay that much for one item, you may feel better paying the same price for your treasure along with an extra bowl or scarf.
- Often the seller will pretend he doesn't have change (or refuse to give you change) and try to sell you a second item instead. Do not give over your money until you see the coins in the vendor's hand. He may have to go to another booth to get change for you, and you don't want him walking away with your cash. If you didn't follow the previous advice and the vendor has your money, follow him and don't let him ignore you or start negotiations with another customer until you have your coins. Ideally, try to have the exact change; it saves a lot of effort and stress.

