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Consumer Rights Abroad by Sean Burke

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Thanks to the UKâ€™s robust retail sector, thereâ€™s a strong awareness of consumer rights across the country. The vast majority of consumers know that if they buy something and it turns out to be faulty, they can return the item and exchange it in the shop it was bought from or with the manufacturer. However, consumer rights abroad can be a little trickier to work your way around. If youâ€™re planning to go on a holiday where youâ€™ll be doing a lot of shopping, make sure you know yo rights and who to complain to if things go pear-shaped.

If you buy something overseas and thereâ€™s a problem with it, the first step is to act like you would do at home. Complain to the trader in question, and if the item comes with a manufacturerâ€™s guarantee or warrantee, lodge a complaint directly with the manufacturer. If youâ€™re travelling in the European Union, you may find that your consumer rights are similar to in the UK. But if youâ€™re outside the EU, donâ€™t assume that your rights are the same, as trading laws are likely to be different.

As a precautionary measure, itâ€™s wise to pay for all your purchases abroad with a credit card. Thatâ€™ because, if you buy a faulty item with a credit card, your provider may share responsibility with the trader in question for damaged goods. If youâ€™re using a MasterCard, Maestro or Visa, you may be able to claim your money back by contacting one of these card companies directly.

If you donâ€™t have a credit card, then try to make sure you know your rights before you buy. For example, if youâ€™re buying a DVD player in a shop abroad, ask a shop assistant if youâ€™ll be able to return the item if it proves to be faulty. If they say yes, ask for written confirmation of this before you complete your purchase.

If, despite all your best efforts, youâ€™re still unable to return a faulty item you bought abroad, itâ€™s time contact a consumer rights group, either in the UK or in the country you shopped in. Consumer rights organisations can help you resolve such disputes, but make sure that you go to the right group with your query.

If youâ€™ve bought goods in the EU, Iceland or Norway, contact the UK European Consumer Centre. For faulty goods bought in Jersey, get in touch with Jersey Trading Standards. For people who have disputes about goods bought in the United States, the Better Business Bureau may be able to help. Other worldwide organisations that may be of assistance include the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs in New Zealand and the Office of Consumer Affairs in Canada.

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