

a bargain in luggage?



off a silk kimono she found in the suitcase she bought at auction

cleans the diamond jewellery and tests the electronic items before selling it all off to the highest bidder in a massive emporium.

At Greasby's, however, what you see when you open the case is what you get. If items are soiled, damaged, broken and dirty — or even if there is virtually nothing inside — you have no recourse.

Despite this, I feel victorious as I return at the end of the auction to pick up my case.

Gary is also there collecting a pile of cases. I open my case, wearing a pair of gloves on the advice of the auction house, and I am hit by the musty smell of wet towels.

Removing the towels, I find some dirty underwear, a men's shirt from Next and three scarves. So far, so unlucky. But as I dig through the collection, I discover three beautiful kimonos with Japanese labels attached.

'That's good,' Gary nods encouragingly. Another couple of regulars chime in and tell me I can sell the suitcase alone for £15.

I ask Gary what he's got and he shrugs and tells me 'mostly Primark'. He is wary of publicity because it brings in more bargain hunters — and more competition.

But with a bit of encouragement he opens a smart brown case and pulls out the first two items he finds: a £725 pair of Joseph PINK leather leggings and a £50 PINK Victoria's Secrets hooded top.

He has snared a case packed with barely worn designer clothing for just £40.

Gary watches my eyes light up. 'For every bag like this, you will get ten more full of dirty clothes from F&F (by Tesco) and Primark,' he tries to persuade me.

But I am not so sure. He later tells me that he once bid £125 on a Rimowa suitcase — which sell for almost £900 in Selfridges — and sold the suitcase alone, without the clothes, for £200.

'You name it, I've had it. Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Prada. But you have to be in it for the long-haul. If you come for one month you might not make anything.'

The key is to do your research and target the most expensive suitcase brands, a young man in a tracksuit tells me.

While you may have to pay up to £70 for a suitcase instead of the usual £15 to £30, you can sometimes make a profit on the case and you are far more likely to get designer clothes inside.

Antler, Samsonite and Linea from House of Fraser are all highly sought after.

For those not inclined to sift through worn clothes, Britain's auction houses sell hundreds of lost and stolen goods recovered by police forces, Customs & Excise officers and county courts.

Greasby's sells anything from bikes, pushchairs and coats left in museum and railway lost property offices to sofas and wardrobes left in storage units.

The rise of online shopping has also seen a parallel rise in online bidding, meaning more people have access to these quirky auctions from the comfort of their own homes.

Bristol Commercial & Valuers

Auctioneers (BCVA) attracts up to 1,000 people to its monthly two-day events — many of whom bid online.

Sam Ewing, associate director at the firm, says it is exciting not knowing what you'll be selling from one week to the next.

He auctions lost property from airports, bus stations, concert and sports arenas, as well as goods from repossessions and bankrupt businesses.

'Last week, we were auctioning off everything from a cafe — from mugs to 3kg packets of coffee beans,' he says.

Despite a rise in online bidding, he says buyers should always try to visit the auction house to view used items for damage.

While businesses generally include brief details of any wear or tear, they are not obliged to list every flaw.

However, many items are brand new. In its Christmas gifts auction, a huge collection of new luxury crockery and cutlery sets, which had been left at an airport, sold for just £35.

BCVA's next auction in January features seized goods — though it will not say where from — and is

expected to include new tablet computers, Kindles and iPhones.

Back at Greasby's, bottles of Moët, Bollinger and Laurent Perrier champagne are being auctioned off alongside BaByliss hair straighteners and Vera Wang perfume.

But not everyone is looking to make a profit. Sibel, in her 50s, tells me she is just looking for a decent suitcase for her holiday to Turkey this Christmas.

And Adowa, 66, a retired nurse from South London, is there to pick up a case of children's clothes for a hospital back home in Ghana.

Any money she makes selling the suitcase, she gives back to the hospital, she says.

As I wheel my suitcase of dirty clothes out of the auction house and towards the nearest charity shop, I pass a woman in a Joules jacket with a Longchamp handbag and I wonder if she found her designer garb in a suitcase.

I realise I am tempted to try my luck again. And if I choose my case wisely I might walk away with a designer wardrobe for just £20.

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MONEY MORSELS

Motor costs

CAR insurance premiums are 19pc higher than they were at the start of the year, according to comparison website Moneysupermarket.

It analysed 873,000 customer quotes and found annual premiums are £597 on average — almost £100 more than they were in January.

Advice offer

PENSIONERS, savers and those with debt troubles will be given free financial guidance by a new Government body from autumn 2018.

The new service is expected to take on the roles of Pension Wise, The Pensions Advisory Service and the Money Advice Service.

Free programmes

SKY is giving its TV customers three months of free access to hit series, including Grey's Anatomy, West Wing and Modern Family. The programmes will appear automatically on their TVs.

Viewers can also watch subscription service Sky Box Sets at no cost for three months, after which it will be cancelled.

Compo boost

SAVERS could soon be compensated up to £1million if their investment provider goes out of business under plans by City watchdog the Financial Conduct Authority.

At present, you'd receive just £50,000. The FCA is consulting on the proposal.

Older landlords

THE average age of landlords is rising as rapidly increasing house prices prevent young buyers entering the buy-to-let market.

According to a study by the London School of Economics, 61pc of landlords are aged 55 or over, compared to 24pc in 2004.

Insurance end

HOMEOWNERS and motorists who have cover with Allianz will have to find a new insurer after the firm stopped selling policies directly to customers. But it will still be possible to get cover with Allianz through a broker.

Exit penalty

THE Government is waiving a controversial exit penalty for savers who take money out of the Lifetime Isa account during the first year.

The new Isa — to be introduced in 2017 — gives a 25pc annual Government boost on up to £4,000 of savings. But there is a 25pc exit charge if you withdraw cash before the age of 60 for anything other than buying a first home or if you are terminally ill.

Debt worries

LIVING beyond your means is the main reason for bankruptcy among Britons, according to insolvency trade body R3.

The second most common reason for men is poor management of their own business, while for women it is a relationship breakdown.

Rent rises

THE average rent hit a record £1,188 in November, up from £1,177 at the start of the year, according to research by mortgage lender Landbay.

If you exclude prices in London, where tenants typically pay £1,883 a month, the average UK rent costs £749.

Christmas

refundable and then can't get to your destination you could also lose money.

A spokesman for website Travelsupermarket says: 'You're normally covered only if you booked your holiday and bought travel insurance before strike dates were announced.'

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