

Bring on the

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By Jeana Coleman

I confess – I am a jewelry-a-holic. I am sure it's hereditary. As a young child, I marveled over my grandmother's dresser drawers filled with hundreds of glittery rhinestone brooches, necklaces, rings and beads of every color, shape and size. Today, I treasure her collection and feel her presence every time I wear a piece.

However, as part of my "condition," I can't help but add to my jewelry collection while traveling around Europe. Yet I don't feel guilty. Instead of postcards, pottery and dinners at lavish restaurants, I take photos, eat from street vendors and save my souvenir dollars for sparkly baubles.

From silver in Barcelona, rubies in Nuremberg, pink coral in Rome and vintage surprises at local flea markets and bazaars, it is so fun to find a special shiny something for a great deal. The search is also half of the fun.



Vintage cut glass cameo and Bakelite and rhinestone brooches. © Jeana Coleman

Idar-Oberstein, Germany – For more than 500 years, stonecutters have honed their skills on natural agate, jasper and amethyst mined near this quaint town in northern Rheinland-Pfalz. Today, several generations of jewelry designers still cut stones and create exceptional jewelry; the town is also still considered a world-class cameo-carving center specializing in agate. Shop for handcrafted cameos, Baltic amber, gemstone jewelry, carved statues, vases, bowls and more. Then, learn about their fascinating stonecutting history at the Deutsches Edelsteinmuseum.



Vintage Bakelite muse cameo and rhinestones. © Jeana Coleman

Various, Italy – Mediterranean coral and shells have been harvested and used in hand-carved cameos for thousands of years. Torre del Greco, just south of Naples, is also known as a world-class cameo-carving center. The local Scognamiglio family sells their cameos worldwide (www.cascosrl.it). However, if you're in Venice, stop by Gioielleria Eredi Jovon on the Rialto Bridge. You'll find vintage cameos, coral jewelry and hand-carved cameos made on demand (www.eredijovon.com) with affordable prices.

Another gem in Venice is Gloria Astolfo. This tiny store is overflowing with fashionable accessories and quirky, one-of-a-kind jewelry designs reasonably priced and handmade from coral, semiprecious stones and Swarovski crystals.

Italy, especially Florence, is famous for its high quality, finely crafted gold jewelry. While looking for your signature souvenir, steer clear of the inflated prices found along Ponte Vecchio. Instead, choose small studios where artisans create their own designs, such as Oro Due, near the Uffizi Gallery. Their 18-karat jewelry is unique and made in traditionally Florentine craftsmanship.

Prague and Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic – Bohemian, or pyrope garnets, found only in this region of eastern Europe, are popular among tourists, and rightfully so. Deep, blood red in color, they are traditionally set in elaborate designs featuring



Collection of silver, gold, vintage and contemporary pieces. © Jeana Coleman

numerous small stones that create a stunningly dramatic effect. While there are numerous shops exclusively selling *Ceský Granát* (Czech garnets), shop at reputable stores, such as *Ceský Granát Turnov* or *Studio Sperk* (www.drahonovsky.cz), or antique dealers specializing in vintage pieces.

Prague is decorated with numerous exquisite buildings designed by Czech artist Alphonse Mucha, considered the father of art nouveau. Many antique stores in Prague specialize in art deco and art nouveau jewelry, my ultimate favorites.

While window-shopping along Old Town, I was transfixed for several minutes by a dazzling art deco/art nouveau jewelry display. My husband patiently waited while I did mental math. New diamond ring, or nursery furniture ... well, the baby got his bed. Guess I need another visit to Prague.

Bazaars and Flea Markets – Visit those holiday bazaars held on local installations each fall and winter. I ran into the same silversmith two years in a row with great prices on semiprecious stones set in silver.

Flea markets are also an exciting place to search for jewelry. One Saturday my friend Gen and I ventured to the monthly Homburg flea market. We both scored great items. I purchased a vintage coral cameo ring set in silver, while she bought a vintage choker with real jade beadwork, both 20 euros each. During a recent visit, I found vintage



Gen's turquoise and smoky quartz necklace from a vendor at the Ramstein Bazaar. © Jeana Coleman

red and black faceted crystal necklaces for only a euro a strand.

Strasbourg's market had case after case of beautiful pieces. However, nothing was marked and we had a language barrier. In Rome, I found beautiful pink coral, malachite and lapis lazuli beaded necklaces at the Campo de Fiori market. It did take a good 15 minutes to settle on a price, and the metalwork was not real silver, although he claimed it was. Which brings me to an important topic: what to watch for.

A Few Words before Purchasing – Jewelry shopping can be fun and a good investment. But you should do your research, trust your intuitions about hard sales tactics and walk away when it seems too good to be true.

Many fake stones are now imported from China (turquoise, coral, amber, etc.) and are used in all kinds of semiprecious and costume jewelry. Research stone properties and markings to watch for, especially if you tend to buy expensive pieces.

Consider carrying a jewelry loop (and flashlight to early morning flea markets). You can see cracks in stones, metal hallmarks and details that the naked eye can't see.

Gold in Italy is usually sold by weight. Keep up with the current price, as well as how much local labor markups should be. A good site is <http://goldpricenetwork.com>.

And always research the type of jewelry you hope to find. Many scam salesmen hope to take advantage of uneducated tourists shopping for jewelry.

My friend Gen also happily suffers from jewelry-holism. See the inset for her favorite picks for fabulous European bling. ■



Gen's crystal, rhinestone and gold wire and mesh necklace from Paris. © Jeana Coleman

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Fabulous Finds

By Genevieve Northup

Art & Antik – Saarbrücken, Germany

While walking with my husband to meet friends for dinner, I stopped in my tracks. Although the store was closed for the night, I took photos with my iPhone of the stunning reproductions of vintage statement necklaces, pendants, chandelier earrings, bracelets and cocktail rings gleaming in the windows. Thrilled by the quality for the price, I have returned several times, including for my Valentine's Day and anniversary gifts. The store also has a section of antique jewelry, silver, gold and gemstones. Visit www.artundantik.eu, and you'll see a photo of the jewelry display on the info page.

Plaza de España – Madrid, Spain

We stumbled on this market and I spent an hour trying on pieces from various vendors. You'll find artisan work with silver and gemstones at reasonable prices, but I focused on the vast selection of costume jewelry, particularly unique statement necklaces at prices almost too good to be true.

Ezis Boutique – Èze, France

This boutique has impeccable apparel and show-stopping reproduction vintage pieces. According to the owner, several celebrities have visited over the years. The jewelry is expensive but spectacular.

La Basilica Galeria – Barcelona, Spain

Every case at this store, located on Calle Sant Sever, is dedicated to a different designer with very different materials, techniques and styles. Whether you like modern or vintage, costume or real, you can find anything and everything. The jewelry is expensive, depending on what tickles your fancy. Unfortunately the incredible necklace that I fell in love with was out of our price range, but I still dream about it.

