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Are Your Souvenirs Part of the Problem? - Earth911.com

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The couple carrying 16 pounds of ivory confiscated at SeaTac Airport was probably breaking the law intentionally. Most people know not to buy ivory or tiger parts. But sometimes people buy souvenirs without realizing that they are banned or harmful. Could your souvenirs be part of the problem?

Common Mistakes

Ironically, tourists sometimes purchase items made from endangered species thinking that they are fake. Shoppers unfamiliar with the real thing can't always tell the difference between ivory and regular bone or tortoiseshell and plastic. Few vacationers can identify protected rosewood, the most-trafficked endangered species in the world. Just because something is being sold openly does not mean that it is legal, and many legal souvenirs are unethical. Some very popular souvenirs are environmentally harmful. And if you get caught with banned items upon your return, authorities will not accept ignorance as an excuse.

Do Your Homework

It's easier to avoid problems if you research what kinds of souvenirs are popular — and potentially problematic — before you leave home. Some items are completely illegal, while others may be permissible under certain circumstances and with proper documentation. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) travel guide outlines product categories that commonly support the illegal wildlife trade. Their law enforcement traveler tips page provides more detailed information. The U.S. State Department maintains a website for each nation. Look under “Local Laws & Special Circumstances” to find out whether the country you are visiting has restrictions on items not already covered by international law. If you still have questions, check with an FWS inspection office.

Shop Carefully