

# Alvin's money savers

Check out money expert **Alvin Hall** – he's going to save you pounds every week

## PAY OFF YOUR CREDIT CARD – NOW!

Have you opened your post-summer holiday credit card bill yet? If you're worried about what you'll see, you're not alone. It's easy to spend a little – or a lot – more than you planned to when you're away, especially if you're overseas. There's something psychological about having to translate the currency that makes it harder to keep an eye on what you spend!

But if your credit card has put on some holiday pounds, it's time to go on a debt diet. Follow my tips...

**£** Don't make only the minimum payment shown on your statement. Card companies set the minimum at a low level – often between 2% and 5% of the amount you owe. If you only pay the minimum, it will take years to pay off your balance. For example, if you owed £1,000 on a credit card charging 16% APR and made the minimum payments of 2.5% every month – £25 – it would take 15 years and 10 months to clear your debt, according to whatthecost.com.

**£** Pay a little extra every month and it will make a big difference. If you paid an extra £10 a month

(£35 instead of £25), on the £1,000 on a credit card charging 16% APR cited above, you would cut ten years off your repayment – and made a big saving.

**£** If you owe money on several credit cards, work out which one is charging the highest interest rate (look at the annual APR, not the monthly rate) and pay the maximum you can afford on that card and the minimum on the rest. Continue with this strategy until you've paid off all your cards.

**£** You can cut your debt even faster if you transfer your balance to a 0% or low-interest rate card. But you may damage your credit score by switching your debt from card to card. You may also have to pay balance transfer fees (of up to 3%).

**£** Keep motivated. Think of how you'll feel once you've paid off your credit card debts. Work out how much more money you'll have each month when you've cleared them and decide on a treat that you'll buy – using cash – once you've reached a specific goal.

**GOT A HOT MONEY-SAVING TIP? I'D LOVE TO HEAR IT!**

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**Each week in Reveal I'll be sharing my advice with you**

Something nice to look forward to – that's what many of us will need now that summer's ending. The credit card statements from your holiday have arrived in the post – and the balances are more than you expected. Your finance-saving fantasy of meeting a rich love interest or winning the National Lottery while away hasn't panned out. And daylight is getting shorter.

This week's column tells you how to pay off those credit card bills faster, why playing the Lottery on holiday may not be a smart move, and how to bag a low-cost autumn treat that can give you a lift without straining your finances.

*Alvin*  
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Like you, Kelly Brook hopes she'll be the lucky winner of the Lottery

## Q&A

**I like to play the Lottery and have done it online when I go on holiday. A friend of mine says I shouldn't do it as it's against the law. Who's right?**

*Marilyn, Liverpool*

**ALVIN SAYS:** The answer depends on where you go on holiday, but it's possible that your friend is right. The problem is that many countries don't let you play the UK National Lottery online while you're not physically in the UK. It doesn't matter where you normally

live; it's where you are when you log onto the website that's important. The list of countries includes Spain, the USA and the Netherlands, although it's likely to include many others.

Camelot, which runs the National Lottery, says it makes this clear with a series of warnings. It also sends emails during the holiday season to people who've registered to play online. However, there's been some criticism that these warnings don't spell out the rules clearly enough.

If you want to play the Lottery while you're away, it's best to buy tickets before you go. But with the odds of winning the jackpot being 14 million to one, it's money you're essentially throwing away – and I'm sure you could think of more beneficial things to do with a pound.

**MY TOP 5 TIPS**

## AFFORDABLE AUTUMN BREAKS

**1** Find two or three websites that offer deals that fit the type of short breaks you like, as well as your budget – try [lastminute.com](http://lastminute.com), [teletext.holidays.co.uk](http://teletext.holidays.co.uk) and [tripadvisor.co.uk](http://tripadvisor.co.uk). If you can, sign up for emails or visit the site regularly.

**2** Be flexible so that you can take advantage of last-minute deals – from trains, airlines, hotels and restaurants – especially in places where the peak season has passed. Many websites will offer suggestions for holidays if you're prepared to try somewhere new.

**3** Set the maximum amount you can afford to spend and break that down to daily limits. It may sound dull, but it's actually liberating. You can relax knowing you don't have to worry about the bills when you get back home.

**4** Focus on activities that cost little or nothing – such as taking long walks to discover the area, window shopping, sitting in a café (stretching out your coffee or glass of wine!) or people watching. You're only away for a weekend, so don't feel you have to cram everything in. Take it slowly.

**5** Only take the amount of cash you've budgeted for the entire weekend. Use a credit card just for emergencies. Plan one nice meal at a restaurant that specialises in locally-sourced foods – let that be your one planned indulgence.

