



Keep your finances cool this summer

With summer finally here, you may be looking forward to enjoying a carefree barbecue with family and friends or taking that dream holiday. No matter what you're planning for the warm months ahead, don't let money matters be the dark cloud on the horizon. Let's Talk spoke to the **Financial Ombudsman Service** – the free service with the power to sort out problems between consumers and financial businesses – for some top tips on how to stay money-savvy this summer.

■ Watch your windows

It's great to be able to throw open your doors and windows and let the summer breeze in – but make sure you don't leave your house or car unlocked. If you're unfortunate enough to be robbed by an opportunist thief you could find your insurance policy won't pay out. Take the extra time to ensure everything is secure and locked – even if you're only popping out for five minutes.

■ Caravan

If you own or plan to purchase a caravan make sure you have appropriate insurance in place to cover it. If you're towing a caravan ensure your motor insurance allows for this. If you have a static caravan there may be security features required by your insurer, so make sure you read the policy carefully and keep the documents in a safe place.

■ Calendars and catalogues

If you've been searching the catalogues for a new summer wardrobe or garden furniture be sure to keep an eye on your payment date; it may not always fall on the same day each month. Some catalogue companies debit the payment from your account every 28 days – which means your payment date will shift.

■ Interest free credit

If you're planning on making a significant purchase this summer – like a new lawn mower or barbecue equipment – you might be considering using an interest-free credit deal. These agreements allow you to spread the cost of the purchase without paying interest for a specified period. But if you sign up, make sure you know when the interest free period ends and try to pay it off before it does, as repayments after this date can be expensive.

■ Summer holiday

As much as we're all hoping for a sizzling summer the great British weather may let us down. If you're heading abroad for your summer sun, remember that a good travel insurance policy can help you out if things go wrong. Find a policy that works for you and covers the activities you plan to do – and remember, cheaper isn't always necessarily better. While the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) gives you access to healthcare in many European countries, it won't cover you for everything.

■ Hopefully the only thing you have to worry about this summer is overcooking the burgers on the barbecue! But if a financial problem does crop up and you can't sort it out with the business, the Financial Ombudsman Service may be able to help on 0300 123 9 123 or www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk.