

Summer made easy



Just a couple of months ago we were in the grip of one of the coldest and wettest spells on record. Now as we dare to dream summer might be round the corner many of us are shaking off the layers, dusting down the swimsuits and hoping for a not so traditional British summer!

While we can't guarantee you the sun will shine all summer long, we can give you some tips to stop you getting hot and bothered with your finances this year. We asked Nic Atkinson, ombudsman and financial forecaster, what to watch out for, so you can enjoy the longer days without money worries.

- **Ensure you insure:** If you're planning a getaway, don't forget to make sure you have a decent insurance policy in place. Many insurers offer specific travel insurance for people with a disability, so shop around – but remember the cheapest policy is not necessarily the best one for you. Check what the policy does, and more importantly, doesn't cover. Let your insurer know about any pre-existing medical conditions you have too. You can also have a policy that covers you in the run-up to your holiday, should you need to cancel. If in doubt, check with your insurer what you're covered for.

- **Keep covered with credit:** Using a credit card to pay for your holiday – or making some holiday purchases – can offer you extra legal protection thanks to section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act. This useful piece of legislation covers you if what you bought isn't what it was advertised as – or you don't receive it at all. There are a number of rules that must apply before you can make a claim – for example, the purchase price must be between £100 and £30,000, but if something goes wrong, your credit provider could provide a refund.

Remember though that section 75 doesn't cover you for not liking something. So if you hate your holiday destination, I'm afraid you won't be covered!

- **Last minute bargains:** If you're tempted by an online deal on a new summer wardrobe or a last minute holiday, think before you click. If you've not used the holiday company or website before it's a good idea to run a quick internet search for reviews from people who have used them. Reading a few reviews can show if there are any common problems that other users of the site have experienced. If the deal looks too good to be true, then it might just be – so don't hand over any personal information or account details if you are unsure about the company or site.

- **Summer wardrobe:** Everyone wants to look great in their holiday snaps and a new summer wardrobe can help you feel fabulous. There are some great deals and discounts to be had online so it pays to shop around. While store cards can come with big money-off incentives, the interest charged on them can be as high as 40%. So check before you sign up and stay on top of your repayments. Using a catalogue can be a good way to spread the cost of a purchase, but some companies will ask for payments every 28 days so the payment date will shift backwards every month. Keep a note of when your next bill is due to avoid any late payment fees.

- **Have a back-up plan:** From lost wallets on the beach to problems with plastic cards, it's a good idea to have back-up

funds to hand should something go wrong. If you're going abroad, let your bank know in advance if you're planning to use your card as this can help avoid any problems accessing your money. Your bank may still need to identify you for security reasons while you're away, so keep a record of their international phone number just in case.

Hopefully taking these steps will give you the freedom to enjoy some carefree fun in the sun (however much or little there may be) without a financial problem casting a shadow over you. However, if a problem does crop up the Financial Ombudsman Service – the free service that you can talk to if you're unhappy with a bank or insurer – may be able to help on 0300 123 9 123 or www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk

