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By Ruth Lythe

**MILLIONS** of holiday-makers are being exposed to a currency sting when swapping back spending money they haven't used.

Some travellers are losing almost a fifth of their unused holiday spending money through this manipulation of exchange rates, a Money Mail investigation has revealed.

In the worst cases, you could lose almost £20 on each £100 of leftover spending money — that's £100 down the drain if you bring back £500 of currency.

Marc Gander, spokesman for the Consumer Action Group, branded some of the exchange rates uncovered by our investigation as 'outrageously expensive'.

He says: 'This is an example of companies making money from unknowing consumers for doing very little. I'm sure nobody thinks they are going to lose nearly 20pc of their holiday cash just by changing their money.'

Prepaid cards that you load with money before your holiday can offer better exchange rates, but they hit you with fees of up to £10 to cash them in on your return.

But the most expensive transactions are those made at bureaux de change at airports and ferry terminals, where exchange rates are normally less favourable than on the High Street or online.

For example, every £100 at a Travelex outlet at Heathrow Airport would buy you €103.20. But if you changed that money back you would get just £81.24, leaving you almost £19 out of pocket, according to website Travelsupermarket.

For those heading Stateside, £100 at the same Travelex branch would buy you \$149.39. But if you were to change that money back to sterling you would get only £81.70 — a loss of more than £18.

Travelex has better rates if you book on the internet and pick up the cash at the airport. And for a £3.99 fee paid upfront, it will let you sell back money at the same rate you bought it for.

A Travelex spokeswoman says: 'The shops we run at airports offer our customers effectively a tourist premium service that is open 24

# High price of bringing home cash from your holidays

## Exchange rate tricks can cost a fifth of your money

hours a day, 365 days a year. This clearly incurs an additional cost.'

Bob Atkinson of Travelsupermarket says: 'Ignore the smokescreens of commissions and exchange rates. Simply ask the question "How many pounds will I get for my foreign currency?" and go for the one with the highest amount.'

Even those using some of the most popular places on the High

Street face losing large chunks of their money if they bring cash back from holiday.

At the Post Office, £100 would buy you €108.27 on its Travel Money Card Plus, but if you converted money back on your return you would receive only £85.23.

And it charges €6 or \$7.50 on top of this to cash in the card, depending on whether it's euros or dollars.

## Halifax U-turn on top Isa account

**HALIFAX** has backed down from closing its Isa Direct Reward following exposure in Money Mail. Last week it told us that it was to close the account to new savers from June 18. Now it has had a change of heart and will keep the account open for the time being.

The account pays 3pc — one of the top rates on easy access cash Isa accounts. But after you have been in the account for a year, you need to switch out because the rate drops dramatically, currently to just

0.5pc. Unlike with other top-paying accounts, you can transfer your existing cash Isas into the Halifax Isa Direct Reward. It promises to pay the 3pc rate on your money from the time it receives your completed application form rather than when the money turns up from your current provider. Top rates on easy access accounts — including an initial bonus — which do not allow transfers come from AA Internet Access Isa at 3.35pc and Santander Flexible Isa 3 at 3.3pc.

**HOW £100 OF YOUR HOLIDAY MONEY GETS EATEN AWAY**



<b>EUROS</b>	Rate to buy your money (€)	Rate to sell it back (€)	What you are left with
Ice Prepaid	1.1067	1.12	£97.98
OnlineFX	1.1	1.16	£95.00
Caxton Card	1.1	1.15 + £1.50 fee	£94.15
Marks and Spencer	1.0844	1.22	£88.85
NatWest	1.0791	1.2404	£87.00
Thomas Cook Card	1.0983	1.27	£86.48
FairFX Card	1.106	1.14 + £10 fee	£86.37
Post Office cash	1.0966	1.27	£86.35
Travelex Prepaid	1.097	1.19 + €7 fee	£81.24
Travelex Glasgow	1.0326	1.27	£81.24
Travelex Heathrow	1.0326	1.27	£81.24
Post Office Prepaid	1.08	1.26 + €6 fee	£80.63

<b>DOLLARS</b>	Rate to buy your money (\$)	Rate to sell it back (\$)	What you are left with
ICE Prepaid	1.6027	1.637	£97.98
OnlineFX	1.59	1.7	£94.00
Caxton Prepaid	1.592	1.67 + £1.50 fee	£93.82
Marks and Spencer	1.585	1.764	£89.85
NatWest	1.5564	1.7874	£87.00
Post Office cash	1.5884	1.83	£86.79
FairFX Prepaid	1.6	1.66 + £10 fee	£86.62
Thomas Cook Prepaid	1.59	1.84	£86.41
Travelex Prepaid	1.59	1.72 + \$10 fee	£86.31
Post Office Prepaid	1.5884	1.83 + \$7.50 fee	£82.07
Travelex Glasgow	1.49	1.8284	£81.70
Travelex Heathrow	1.49	1.8284	£81.70

The Post Office argues it is unlikely that travellers would be fully hit by its charges for selling back currency because they'd probably keep the euros on their cards until they next needed some.

The best deals tend to come from online currency specialists and prepaid cards.

Onlinefx.com would give back £94 on a dollar transaction.

New rules mean card companies are now not allowed to stop you cashing in your card even if it has less than €10 on it, and can no longer set a time limit on you getting your money back.

Also, if the card company becomes insolvent your money will be protected.

FairFX's prepaid currency cards, which you can order online, would give back £96.37 for every £100 that had been changed into euros. But you must pay £10 to convert the card into sterling, bringing your total down to £86.37.

FairFX spokesman David Bain said that the charge was to cover the

cost of employees to convert the card back as well as a charge from a supplier.

Caxton's prepaid dollars card would give you £95.32 back, with a £1.50 charge to cash the card in.

The ICE card is also good value: those exchanging £100 into Euros and then back again receive £97.98, and £97.98 for the same transaction made in dollars. It does not charge a fee to get your money back.

Not all are such good value. Thomas Cook's prepaid card would buy \$158.90 for £100. But converting back, you'd get only £86.41, after being stung by an exchange rate of \$1.84 to every pound.

And it charges £6 online to get the balance back from your card — although this service is free if you go into a shop and the company says it will match rivals' buyback currency rates where necessary.

See the best way to spend on holiday at [www.thisismoney.co.uk/travel-cash](http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/travel-cash).

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