

Buying Rocks, Minerals and crystals on line

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I thought I would put together a brief guide to buying the above online as I am constantly asked about it and the pit falls and horror stories. First let me say there are a lot of good reputable dealers online only a small handful mislead on purpose and there are a few due to lack of knowledge don't really know what they are selling and may have been misled when they purchased it.

A quick run through the definitions of the above before I start

What is a Rock?

A rock is essentially a collection of minerals that have come together by natural processes to form an aggregate mass we call a rock – having no specific chemical composition

What is a mineral?

A mineral can be either a single element – such as gold or diamond or a collection of elements that come together to form a solid with a characteristic chemical composition. (Interesting fact under the definition of a mineral water is not a mineral but if you freeze it to ice it is)

What is a Crystal?

A crystal is essentially a mineral that has been given room to grow into a definite crystal shape. These are very brief and simple definitions and there are always exceptions to the rule but are easy starting points to remember.

My first step before spending your money is know what you are buying – by this I mean once you have found a specimen you like or know what you are after – do a bit of research into that mineral (I will use the word mineral throughout this guide but it also relates to rocks and crystals). Check things like what colour do they naturally occur what is their normal habit (how do they occur) and where do they normally occur and their rarity.

Have a close look at the description on eBay and the photo's provided – do these match what you would expect – if not why not ask the seller a few questions – most good sellers will not mind this in fact I really like it when buyers do.

Have a look at the seller's feedback what others have been saying about the specimens they have brought.

If the specimen really looks too good to be true and the price is really low – ask yourself have I really found that bargain or do I need to do some more investigation and ask some more questions.

Some minerals are very hard to determine what they are without full chemical analysis so sometime with self-collected minerals the name and description may be what the seller thinks they are no matter how informed they are mistakes can be made we are only human after all – but in asking questions if you know what you are looking at them you can gauge the seller's knowledge.

Another point to really look at and what I find annoys people I speak to who have bought off of eBay is the size of the specimen when it arrives. Check and then double check what size they have in the description and make sure you know what unit of measurement they are using – if you are not sure don't assume ask. (I have taken to photographing my minerals with a steel rule in the picture so there is no confusion)

Be aware of unusual names – if you do not recognise a mineral name do some research on it – there are some sellers that will give something a particular name to make a common mineral sound that bit more special and unusual.

If you can enlarge the picture try and do so and check if there is any evidence of any damage or repair that may have taken place – or if it looks too perfect.

There are many minerals that are commonly faked and I have listed a couple below but if you go to mindat they have a whole section on the message board that goes through the fakes that are out there and makes really good reading.

Smelt Quartz – often cherry red in colour and is more than often glass and on close examination you can often see gas bubbles and flow line within the glass – often sold as spheres and large cut and polished crystals

Okenite – bright green, yellow, blues and pinks – these are all dyes for the Chinese market – Okenite does not come in these bright colours.

Magnetic Hematite – again another fake material out there often sold – hematite is not Ferro magnetic and these specimens are man made.

Citrine – Often the ones seen are heat treated amethyst be aware of large bright coloured Citrines as these will more often be fake

Large perfect Quartz crystals – at best cut and polished pieces of quartz or at worse cut and polished glass

Smokey Quartz often irradiated quartz from Arkansas or China

Agates – bright coloured specimens are often dyed.

Bornite – Often chemically treated Chalcopyrite

I could go on and on.

So, to sum it up in a few words – do some research so you know what you are buying – look at the advert closely and ask questions and get a rapport with the seller

Cheers

Rocks and Crystals team