

Andorra vows to kick habit of cigarette advertising

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The tax haven of Andorra has long been a favourite destination for smokers looking to stock up on cheap cigarettes, but the enclave said Thursday that it would soon stop advertising the fact.

The government said it had signed up to the World Health Organization's (WHO) anti-tobacco convention, which aims to encourage people to quit smoking and combat contraband sales.

"The goal is to contribute to public health and pursue the fight against trafficking," government spokesman Jordi Cinca said at a press conference.

The tiny principality of Andorra, perched in the Pyrenees on the border between France and Spain, attracts millions of shoppers each year to duty-free stores, where prices of alcohol, cigarettes, electronics and clothes can be up to 20 percent cheaper than elsewhere in the EU.

High taxes on tobacco imposed by many countries to help people kick smoking make Andorra's cigarettes a particularly good deal.

The average pack costs just three euros (\$3.50) compared with eight euros in France, which has said it will gradually raise the price to 10 euros a pack by November 2020.

Tobacco sales bring in some 110 million euros a year for Andorra, whose economy is otherwise based almost entirely on tourism.

It is also an enticing destination for smugglers, with French and Spanish border agents regularly seizing cartons from people trying to sneak them out, either by car or by hiking down the mountain trails which criss-cross the Pyrenees.

No date has been set for the advertising ban, which will come into effect three months after the ratification of the WHO accord is voted by parliament.

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