

Article

# Avoid Scams When You Travel

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You may get a call, a text message, or a flyer in the mail Or maybe you may see an online ad promising free or low-cost vacations. Scammers and dishonest people are often behind these offers. You may end up paying hidden fees — or worse: after you pay, you might find out it's all a scam.

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## Common Travel Scams

### “Free” vacations

You’ve probably seen ads online for “free” vacations. Or you may have gotten emails, calls, or text messages saying you’ve won a vacation, even though you never entered a contest. If you respond to these offers, you’ll quickly learn that you have to pay some fees and taxes first — so your “free” vacation isn’t really free. A legitimate company won’t ask you to pay for a free prize.

### Robocalls about vacation deals

You might get robocalls offering you vacation deals at a discounted price. [Robocalls](#) from companies trying to sell you something are illegal unless the companies got **written** permission, directly from you, to call you that way. If someone is already breaking the law by robocalling you without permission, there’s a good chance it’s a scam. At the very least, it’s a company you don’t want to do business with.

### International travel document scams

You might see sites that claim to be able to help you get an international travel visa, passport, or other documents. These sites are just copycats of the [U.S. Department of State](#) website. But these sites charge you high fees, including fees for services that are free on the government’s official site.

## International driving permit scams

An international driving permit (IDP) translates your government-issued driver's license into 10 languages. Scammers create websites to sell fake IDPs, or try to sell them to you in person or some other way. If you buy a fake IDP, you'll be paying for a worthless document. But, even worse, you also could face legal problems or travel delays if you're detained for using it to drive in a foreign country. Only [the U.S. Department of State](#), the American Automobile Association (AAA), and the American Automobile Touring Alliance (AATA) are authorized to issue IDPs.

## Vacation home scams

These days, it's easy to connect directly with property owners who advertise their vacation homes online. But scammers are also trying to get your [rental booking](#). For example, they hijack real rental listings and advertise them as their own, so when you show up for your vacation, you find out that other people are also booked for the same property. You have no place to stay, and your money is gone. Other scammers don't bother with real rentals — they make up listings for places that aren't really for rent or don't exist.

## Charter flight scams

You may get a flyer in the mail, see an ad, or hear from someone in your community about an offer to travel by private plane to some place you'd like to go. The offer may even include lodging and sightseeing tours. You think you're signing up for a charter flight and vacation package, but after you pay, you find out it's all a scam. The U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Special Authorities Division maintains a [list of approved public charter flights](#). If the charter filing is not approved by DOT before the package is sold, you're probably dealing with a dishonest charter operator.

## Signs of a Scam

- **A “free” vacation that you have to pay for.** Scammers often try to get your attention by saying you won something, but then making you pay to get it. But that's a scam. If you have to pay, it's not really free — and all those fees and taxes can add up to hundreds of dollars.
- **Not getting specific details about the travel offer.** The offer says you'll stay at a “five-star” resort or go on a cruise on a “luxury” ship. But if the organizer won't or can't give you more specific details, like the address of the hotel or the cruise company name, walk away. That's a scam.
- **They say the only way to pay for your vacation rental is by [wire transfer](#), [gift card](#), or [cryptocurrency](#).** This is how scammers ask you to pay because once they've collected the money, it's almost impossible to get it back. That's a scam, every time.
- **Pressure to make a quick decision about a vacation package or rental.** If someone says you have to decide whether to buy a travel package or rent a vacation property right away, don't do it. Scammers want to rush you. So move on and find another option.
- **Premium vacation properties advertised for super cheap prices.** Below-market rent can be a sign of a scam. Do some extra research to confirm the deal is legitimate before jumping in. And then review these signs of a scam before you pay.

## 3 Ways To Avoid Travel Scams

1. **Don't sign or pay until you know the terms of the deal.** Get a copy of the cancellation and refund policies before you pay. If you can't get those details, walk away. Say "no thanks" to anyone who tries to rush you without giving you time to consider the offer.
2. **Do your own research.** Look up travel companies, hotels, rentals, and agents with the words "scam," "review," or "complaint." See what others say about them before you commit. Also, check that the address of the property really exists. If the property is located in a resort, call the front desk and confirm their location and other details on the contract.
3. **Don't pay with wire transfers, gift cards, or cryptocurrency.** Dishonest travel package promoters might ask you to pay in one of these ways, but that's a sure sign of a scam. If you pay with wire transfers, gift cards, or cryptocurrency and there's a problem with what you paid for, you'll lose your money, and there's likely no way to track it or get it back.

## How To Shop for Travel

- **Get recommendations from trusted sources.** Talk to family and friends or other trusted sources about good travel agencies, vacation rentals, hotels, and travel packages.
- **Consider using a travel app.** Travel apps can help you search for airfares and hotel rates. Some of them give you fare alerts and real-time deals. But make sure you know whether you're buying from the app company or the actual airline or resort. It can affect things like whether you can get a refund or get travel points.
- **Use comparison websites and applications.** When you shop for airfares, know that comparison websites and applications can charge more than the airline for services like changing or canceling a flight. Also, make sure you know whether you're buying a ticket or just making a reservation.
- **Ask about mandatory hotel "resort fees" and taxes.** You can't compare rates for different hotels unless you know about all the fees. If you're not sure whether a hotel's website is showing you the **total** price, call the hotel and ask about a "resort fee" or any other mandatory charge. Also ask about taxes, which may be significant in many places.
- **If you're buying travel insurance, be sure the agency is licensed.** Find out whether an agency is licensed at the [website of the US Travel Insurance Association](#). Make a copy of your insurance card to take with you when you go on the trip.
- **Check that charter flights are listed on the [approved public charter flights](#) of the U.S. Department of Transportation before you pay.** Also, check out the charter's operator with local travel agents to see if they know if the operator is legitimate, or contact the [American Society of Travel Agents](#). The [S. Department of Transportation's website](#) has more tips on what to know about charter flights.

## Report Travel Scams

If you think you may have been targeted by a travel scam, report it to

- the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/ReportFraud)
- your [state attorney general](#)

Search Terms: [rent](#), [scam](#), [travel](#), [vacation](#)

Topics: [Shopping and Donating](#), [Shopping](#)

Scams: [All Scams](#), [Avoiding and Reporting Scams](#)

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