



## Don't Get Tripped Up By Vacation Scams

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MADISON – The official start of summer is only weeks away, but many of us are still finalizing our vacation plans. With so many places to go and so many travel packages to consider, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) asks travelers to watch out for too-good-to-be-true deals and keep a close eye on any fine print that accompanies an offer.

“Scammers know that families are always on the lookout for a good deal on travel packages, and they use this enticement in their ploys,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “Demands for upfront payments, vague promises and high-pressure sales pitches should all be signs that something is not quite right in a so-called ‘deal.’”

Fraudulent vacation-related operations often involve one of two elements: postcard mailers promising free or heavily discounted travel and online advertisements for rental properties.

The postcards may be fronts for high-pressure sales pitches for vacation clubs or timeshares. In some cases they may be ploys to get potential victims to pay taxes or fees on a non-existent prize.

Online ads that feature unbelievably low prices on rental properties in vacation hotspots should alert you to be suspicious of the offer and to do more research. You might even notice that scammers have ripped pictures and descriptions of properties from real estate listings and posted the information to a classified ad as a rental property.

“The supposed ‘owner’ of the property then tells interested renters that he or she is out of town and offers to send the keys once a security deposit is paid upfront, typically by wire transfer,” said Frassetto. “These crooks just take the money and run.”

When considering a vacation offer, remember the following tips:

- Look for a fraud alert or frequently asked questions page on the website where you found the deal to see if there are any warning signs you should watch out for in a solicitation.
- Check that the address of an advertised rental property really exists. If the property is located in a resort, call the front desk and confirm specific details about the location and any promotions they are running.
- Ask for written confirmation of all details: reservation dates, room rates, associated “fees” or mandatory charges, room amenities, time of check-in/check-out and the hotel’s cancellation or refund policy. Knowing this will help when comparing deals.
- Buy your travel package from a business you have confidence in or that comes recommended by family or friends.
- Use a credit card if possible for any purchases. Credit cards give more protection than paying with cash or check.
- Never wire money up front.
- If you receive a “robocall” saying you won a “free” vacation prize, it’s a scam. Hang up and report the caller to DATCP.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at [datcp.wi.gov](http://datcp.wi.gov), send an e-mail to [datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov](mailto:datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov) or call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128.

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