

Five Tips for Avoiding Summer Vacation Scams

Author : David Gurliacci

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Advice [on avoiding summer vacation scams](#) from the Connecticut Better Business Bureau:

Even though many Americans are ready to take some time off and relax, Connecticut Better Business Bureau warns that criminals and con artists are hard at work.

The risk of fraud can begin when you are looking for a rental property for your getaway. Unless you have the help of a reputable realtor or website, you should first confirm that the ad was posted by the property's owner.

It is a reasonable question, because criminals lift photos and descriptions from the internet, post a fake ad pretending they are renting out the property and lure you with very attractive rates.

The con artist will ask you to put down a deposit by wire transfer and may even send you a key. When you show up, you discover the key is fake, and that someone is already living in the property. This scenario is

most commonly found in ads on classified ad sites.

There is also the potential to become the victim of credit card scams once you have checked into a hotel.

The pizza flyer scam

How it works: Outsiders sneak into hotels and slip menus under guests' doors overnight. The photos of the pizza look great, but that's about as close as you will get to the pizza. Using disposable phones, the con artists will ask for your credit card number. However, instead of getting a late snack, you can expect to find mysterious charges on your credit card statement.

The front desk con

How it works: The hotel front desk calls your room late at night or early in the morning to try and catch you off guard. The caller says there's a problem with the hotel's computers and that they need you to verify your credit card number over the telephone. The problem is that the caller is not a hotel employee, but rather someone who is calling rooms at random from outside the hotel.

The free vacation ruse

How it works: You get a postcard telling you that you have won a free vacation. You are instructed to call a telephone number to claim your prize, and they will ask for your credit card number before sending you an information package with details about your getaway.

Even though the vacation is supposed to be free, you will likely not get a dream vacation, but you may get taken for a ride. They will ask for your credit card to assess what they call a "small service charge." Although you are assured that you will be able to cancel the vacation, the window to cancel will have closed by the time you receive your packet. In this scenario, you can expect to find hundreds of dollars in unauthorized charges on your credit card.

Connecticut Better Business Bureau has five tips to avoid many vacation-related scams and other potential problems:

- 1. Don't wire money to strangers** – When booking a vacation or renting a property, avoid anyone who only accepts payment by wire transfer. Use a secure method of payment such as a credit or online payment system.
- 2. Be skeptical about giving out your information** – That includes your credit card number. Ignore food flyers under your hotel room door and remember that the front desk at the hotel will never call to ask you for your credit card number over the phone.

3. Is the vacation really free? – It may appear to be, but like anything else, a free vacation is not free if you have to give out your credit card number.

4. Call your financial institutions before leaving town – It may not be enough just to call your credit card company to tell them you are leaving town. Call your bank as well, since your bank generally sets the level of security associated with your credit card. If you don't do this, your credit card transactions will probably be declined, especially if your purchases don't match your usual spending pattern, for example, using your card in another state or country.

5. Carefully check your receipts and statements – As soon as you get home, reconcile your credit card and banking statements with your receipts. Extra charges are not necessarily fraudulent. Mistakes do happen, and regardless of whether a charge is an error or unauthorized, you should report the problem as soon as possible.

You will find additional consumer tips at the [Connecticut Better Business Bureau website](#).