

## How to Avoid Vacation Rental Scams

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With July 4<sup>th</sup> right around the corner, plenty of us are still running around trying to book a last-minute vacation rental. If that's you, here's what you need to know: Scammers are ready with fake vacation rental ads.

Rental scammers try to get your rental booking and take your money. But when you show up for the vacation, you have no place to stay and your money is gone!

Here are some of the ways they pull off the scam:

Some scammers start with real rental listings. Then they take off the owner's contact information, put in their own, and place the new listing on a different site — though they might continue to use the name of the actual owner. In other cases, scammers hijack the email accounts of property owners on reputable vacation rental websites.

Other scammers don't bother with real rentals — they make up listings for places that aren't really for rent or don't exist. To get people to act fast, they often ask for lower than average rent or promise great amenities. Their goal is to get your money before you find out the truth.

So how do you avoid a rental scam?

- **Don't wire money or pay with a prepaid or gift card for a vacation rental.** Once the scammer collects the money, it is almost impossible to get it back.
- **Don't be rushed into a decision.** If you receive an email pressuring you to make a decision on the spot for a rental, ignore it and move on.
- **Look out for super cheap rates for premium vacation properties.** Below-market rent can be a sign of a scam. Do some extra research to confirm the deal is legitimate before jumping in.
- **Get a copy of the contract before you send any deposit money.** Check that the address of the property really exists. If the property is located in a resort, call the front desk and confirm the location of the property and other details on the contract.

If you come across any of these ads, we want to hear about it — report it to us at [ftc.gov/complaint](https://ftc.gov/complaint), whether you lost money or not.

If you sent money to a rental scammer, contact the company you used to send the money, such as your bank, Western Union, MoneyGram, Green Dot, iTunes, or Amazon and tell them the transaction was fraudulent. They may not be able to get your money back, but it is important to alert them of fraud.

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