



## Don't Let Scammers Steal Your Winter Getaway

**Release Date:** February 4, 2019

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MADISON – Given last week's record-breaking low temperatures, it is natural to let your mind wander to warmer places. If you are planning a winter or spring break getaway, keep an eye out for too-good-to-be-true deals and double-check your reservations by confirming your booking with the hotels, airlines and other travel service providers.

“It takes a lot of planning and preparation to book the perfect vacation, and a couple of simple safety steps can help ensure that you get what you pay for,” said Lara Sutherlin, Administrator for the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection. “Research travel packages that you find online by contacting the businesses represented in the deal and verifying that they are participating in the offer.”

One common travel scam involves fraudsters posting too-good-to-be-true offers for vacation rentals in online classified ads using pictures and text stolen from real estate listings. The phony owner will ask that you wire money or make a payment using a prepaid debit card in order to hold the rental. Before you make any agreements or payments on a rental through an online ad, search for information about the address of the property. If the property is supposedly located in a resort, contact the front desk of the resort to confirm details about the location.

Watch for scams:

- Watch for phony travel websites offering unrealistic deals. The site operators may be looking to steal users' payments and links on these pages could cause you to download malicious software. Do some research before you visit unknown travel sites and be skeptical of sites and deals with glowing positive reviews and few negative ratings.
- Pay for reservations by credit card in order to have some protections in place for your purchase.
- If you book travel plans with a third-party company, call the airline, hotel or other service providers to ensure that the request was sent and you have an actual reservation – not just a confirmation. If you prepaid but the service provider cannot confirm your booking, report the situation to your credit card company immediately.
- Mailings, telephone calls, websites, emails or faxes may offer exotic cruises or trips to tropical paradises, but they are often pitches for worthless “vacation certificates” or vouchers. These “prizes” are typically sales gimmicks to get you to make a purchase, attend a sales presentation or commit to a membership contract.
- A “free” vacation offer may come with a request for payment for fees or taxes. Do not pay it. Remember that a legitimate company will not ask you to pay for a prize.

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

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