



Safe Travels! Pre-Trip Consumer Tips for Spring Break

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MADISON – There is no surer sign that spring is near than a stream of college students dropping off campus and heading to warmer locales. Many Wisconsin families join in the fun, using the break in seasons to shake off the snow and spend some quality time together on a new and exciting adventure.

But this change in routine can put travelers at risk of getting ripped off by scammers and identity thieves. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) asks vacationers to take a couple of pre-trip steps to mitigate their risk and help them travel more securely.

“People tend to let their guard down when they are on vacation, opening up an opportunity for criminals to steal their personal and financial information,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “Travelers can take protective measures against some of the biggest risks like grandparent scams and identity theft via social media before the trip even begins.”

Before you start your trip:

Alert your financial institutions. Call the number on the back of your credit and debit cards and let them know where and when you will be travelling. This advance notice lets the bank know to expect transactions from the area you visit, keeping your account from being locked.

Verify your reservations. If you booked your trip through a third-party website or travel service, confirm your reservations directly with the airline, hotel or car rental business so you don’t get stranded in case of a miscommunication with your booking.

Put your mail on hold. Identity thieves could steal mail from unattended mailboxes, giving them the information they need to misuse your identity and open credit lines in your name. The post office can hold your mail until you return, keeping letters and packages from sitting idle in your mailbox.

Limit what’s in your wallet. Don’t carry your Social Security card in your wallet or purse, keep your passport locked away, and minimize the number of bank cards you take on your trip.

Pack a second credit card. If you lose your main card or it is damaged, you will need a backup. Keep them packed in separate locations.

Photocopy your documents and cards. Make two copies (front and back) of your passport, driver’s license, credit cards, tickets and hotel reservation confirmations. Give one copy to a friend or family member at home and carry the other copy with you, stored securely and separately from the originals. These can come in handy if your original documents are lost or stolen during the trip.

Share your plans with friends and family to avoid “grandparent scams.” Phone scammers could call your relatives while you are away, claim to be you, and ask for money to get out of a phony legal or medical emergency. Make sure your family has a plan in place and a way to reach you directly in case a relative or friend receives one of these frightening calls. As part of the plan, consider using a family code word or phrase to verify legitimate emergency calls.

Tighten the security around your social media accounts. Your social media accounts can reveal everything a thief needs to know to steal your identity or to rob your home in your absence. Adjust the security settings on your social media accounts to only allow friends and

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family to view your posts, and consider turning off the location services on your phone so the photos you post online are not tagged with GPS data. Make sure that the mobile devices you intend to take on your journey are password protected.

For additional information, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <http://datcp.wisconsin.gov>, send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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