



Avoiding Travel Scams

Have you received a telephone call, email, postcard, fax or filled out a card in order to win a “free” vacation, or have you been “selected” for a dream vacation or cruise? If so, then be very careful before you accept the vacation or cruise offer because many are travel scams that defraud consumers out of their money, and leave others with no vacation or paying more money in order to take their “free” vacation.

It works this way -- the company contacts you and offers a “free vacation or cruise.” You will not be told that taxes, port charges, or other fees will be required when the company speaks with you initially. However, the company will want to bill your credit card immediately, or will ask you for your checking account number so they can debit your account. Sometimes, the company will even offer to send an overnight delivery service to your home to pick up your payment before you even have a chance to review the vacation package.

Once you pay, you will have a period of time to use the vacation. When you call to arrange your vacation or cruise, you find the dates you want are not available, but for a fee the company will offer an “upgrade” to a more expensive vacation that is available. Many travelers have found the accommodations and facilities provided through these certificates or vacation packages to be below standard and unacceptable. When travelers complain to the company, they typically receive a response such as, “What do you expect for the small amount of money you paid?”

How to Protect You and Your Family from a Vacation Nightmare

- Get the name, address, telephone and fax number of the company you are dealing with.
- Ask detailed questions about the vacation, what is included, and if there are additional fees and costs. Most importantly, ask about their cancellation or refund policy.
- Request vacation information in writing before you purchase. Once you receive the material, make sure it reflects what you were told over the telephone.
- Get the names of the hotel, airports, airlines and restaurants included in your vacation package. Consider contacting these companies to verify the information.
- Check with other travel agencies in your area and compare the offers.
- If you decide to purchase a vacation package, pay with a credit card. Fraudulent travel operators take the money and run, and even legitimate companies can suddenly go out of business. Credit cards are the safest way to pay for online purchases because you can dispute fraudulent charges within 60 days of the initial billing, if you never get the services you were promised or the offer was misrepresented.
- Be skeptical of postcards or telephone calls announcing you have been selected to receive a vacation. “Selected to receive” does not necessarily mean “free.”
- If you are paying for travel insurance, find out the name of the provider, their address and telephone number and when they will be paid.
- Check out the company with the Ohio Attorney General’s Office, the Better Business Bureau where the company is located or the County of Summit Office of Consumer Affairs.