

Travel Trouble

Is Your Vacation the Real Deal?

Summer is approaching in the northern hemisphere, and for many of us, that means vacations and travel. But with the increasing digitalization of our everyday lives and the rise of AI, it's hard to know whether those plans you're making match what's really available.

One scam in particular is very common: the phony vacation rental. According to the FTC,¹ scammers will copy real rental listings and offer a real property they aren't licensed to rent out. Or they generate fake listings, complete with AI pictures. You pay what looks like a great price for an attractive rental—but you haven't actually booked anything.

As far back as 2023, Airbnb announced that it had removed 59,000 fake listings from its platform. But the problem is only growing.

Other common scams exploit the annoying little details that come with traveling. Scammers send phishing messages impersonating highway toll service providers.

Turns out you owe a toll fee! The message links you to a website where you can pay the supposed toll. But the website is fake, and now the scammer has your payment information.

Travel documents are also desirable targets for criminals. Scam sites offer "special deals" that will help you get a travel visa more quickly or streamline the process of getting your documentation in order. You pay and give them your information, and the scammer walks off with your data.

When it comes to booking a vacation or even going on an overnight trip to the next town, stick with familiar and trustworthy service providers. Always get your documentation through official government resources. And remember that some deals really are too good to be true!

Top Risky Travel Behaviors

According to McAfee,² one in three travelers have put themselves at risk by engaging in these common behaviors while traveling.

22%	Sharing travel plans in real time
22%	Logging into financial apps on public Wi-Fi
41%	Trusting travel-related messages
49%	Using airport Wi-Fi
62%	Scanning QR codes without verifying
63%	Using any form of public Wi-Fi

Spotting the Scam

Scam offers and listings often share characteristics that make them easy to spot. The number-one sign of a scam is **pressure**. Scammers want you to act now and not ask questions. Always take time to think about an offer or a booking before you pay ... Particularly if the website is saying "100% FREE only today!"



1. <https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/avoid-scams-when-you-travel> 2. <https://www.mcafee.com/blogs/internet-security/travel-booking-vacation-scams-how-to-spot/>