

Abstract: Many people are traveling again, for business and for pleasure. But as travel demand increases, so does travel-related fraud. This article describes how scam artists seek to use phone calls, emails and other means to take advantage of travelers — and offers tips to help individuals avoid becoming victims.

As travel returns, so do travel scams

Even though COVID-19 remains a concern, many people have started traveling again — and are planning to take trips during the holiday season. Unfortunately, as travel demand has increased, so has travel-related fraud.

For example, some fraud perpetrators posing as airline employees call would-be victims to try to elicit credit card numbers. Other scam artists send phishing emails that appear to offer cheap seats or rooms. And there are plenty of fake websites masquerading as legitimate travel companies.

Be alert for fraud

As you plan your next trip, take these steps:

Ignore unsolicited communications. If you receive an email, text, flyer or telemarketing call with a travel bargain, it's probably smart to ignore it. Afraid of missing out on a deal? Directly contact the airline, hotel or rental car company featured in the promotion.

Book with established companies. Whether traveling for business or pleasure, make reservations with companies whose names you know. If you're booking with a new service provider, read online reviews by fellow travelers. Some review platforms allow you to search using keywords, others identify keywords frequently used by reviewers and allow you to filter for those reviews. Also, perform an online search with the name of the company and words such as "fraud" or "scam."

Watch out for lodging scams. Many travelers use online property marketplaces to find lodging. But you need to scrutinize listings. Some fraud perpetrators post ads for nonexistent properties with enticing, below-market rates. If a "property owner" asks you to move the conversation off the site to avoid fees, refuse the request. Reputable platforms provide some protections, such as insurance in the event the transaction results in fraud. They also include credit card protection.

Work with trusted services. If you travel frequently or don't have time to research trips, consider engaging a travel advisor or travel agent. These professionals maintain close working relationships with legitimate companies, know about the latest deals, may be able to provide insider tips about your destination and can make reservations for you.

Follow your instincts

Before booking your vacation or business trip, scrutinize it for signs of fraud. If you doubt the legitimacy of a service provider or are suspicious of individuals involved in a transaction, go with your instincts and look elsewhere. Safe travel requires diligence before your journey begins.