

## It Is High Season for These 6 (Avoidable) Travel Scams

### Extreme “Discount” Travel Scams

Third party “discounts” are often scams that tempt you with highly discounted travel values that don’t exist. The scamsters are looking for your credit or debit card numbers, which they’ll take, charge, and leave you with nothing.

Reject offers that sound “too good to be true,” and avoid buying anything from a supplier you don’t recognize or trust without doing a check with the Better Business Bureau. Even a simple Google search can reveal whether or not it’s a travel scam. Above all, never pay in cash, bank transfer, or debit card; with a credit card, you stand a chance of getting your money back.

### The “Free Vacation” Travel Scam

This ploy claims you’ve been “specially selected” to receive a great offer, glowingly described. You’ve been “selected,” alright—selected for a fleecing. What you wind up with is some combination of disappointments and frustrations:

- A strange inability to find available dates for the wonderful vacation, no matter how many dates you submit.
- Offers to “upgrade” the obviously low-end accommodation in the vacation package—upgrades that will cost you more than the all-up cost of an honest tour at its regular price.
- An extended, high-pressure pitch for a timeshare or vacation club membership.

Just say no to any unsolicited offers for a ‘free vacation.’ It’s too good to be true.

### High-Pressure Booking Scams

These types of pitches claim the deal will go away forever if you don’t buy it right away. While some booking sites will push flash deals that have an expiration date, no legitimate travel supplier makes the demand that you *immediately* book your travel.

If you think the pitch has some merit, say you won’t buy until you have a chance to check it out. If that kills the deal, it’s a travel scam.

## **Fake Vacation Rentals**

Rental fraud can be a real problem with transactions that involve individuals rather than companies and agencies. What might look and sound like a great vacation rental may turn out to be a dump or pure nonexistent vaporware. Deal with an agency such as Airbnb that withholds payment until after you check in, or with agencies such as [HomeAway](#) or [Flipkey](#) (one of SmarterTravel's sister sites) that provide oversight on listings. And, as with all travel scams, don't use an untraceable payment system, like cash or money orders.

## **Bait and Switch Bookings**

This kind of trickery has been around almost forever, and in travel scams it usually involves selling you on what looks like a great accommodation, only to find that it's "unexpectedly" unavailable. "But," says the scamster, "we have a substitute accommodation that's just as good."

But of course, it isn't. This scam mostly involves vacation rentals, but a few decades ago a Hawaiian hotel chain with one beachfront property and lots of inland holdings consistently over-promised the beachfront room and shifted guests to inland substitutes. This is another reminder to book accommodations through a trusted source. When dealing with unknown suppliers, also be careful with payments. If ever you're placed in a "substitute" accommodation, don't stay there unless it's really as good as what your initially arranged. If not, you can find your own substitute and take appropriate action to be compensated by the company.

## **The Currency Exchange Scam**

This travel scam has been around as there has been currency. The most prevalent one these days is at international gateway airports where the airport management has given an exclusive franchise for operation of ATMs to an exchange outfit rather than a true bank. Those ATMs may say "no fees," but you get hit with the same gouge retail exchange rate you get at an airport counter, which can be as much as 15 percent above the official rate. Older scams involve fees, charges, and manipulation of paper money at storefront change offices. If you need currency, use a debit card at an ATM operated by a known bank—preferably an ATM inside the bank's office, to avoid the possibility of encountering a skimmer. For minimum loss, use a debit card issued by a bank that doesn't charge foreign transaction fees. If your bank does, it's time to switch.