

ALERT: Winter Holidays Travel Scams

With more than [50 percent](#) of Americans planning to travel this holiday season, Joint Economic Committee Ranking Member Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Chairman David Schweikert (R-AZ), Vice Chairman Eric Schmitt (R-MO), and Senior House Democrat Don Beyer (D-VA) are warning members of the public about travel-related scams. These scams often involve scammers creating fake travel sites or impersonating airlines or hotels to elicit a fraudulent payment or steal someone's identity. Scammers are trying to trick people into paying for trips or lodging that are nonexistent, have exorbitant hidden fees, or are of a far lower quality than advertised.

Travel scams represent a major threat to consumers, especially during the holiday season:

- Last year, travel site Booking.com reported a [500 to 900 percent](#) increase in travel scams over an 18-month period – an uptick it partly attributed to convincing AI-generated scams.
- A major credit card company found a [28 percent](#) increase in travel fraud during the peak winter season last year.
- Travel scams rank among the top 10 most reported frauds, with the [Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\)](#) recording \$274 million in losses from travel, vacation, and timeshare scams in 2024.

This travel scams alert is part of ongoing Congressional efforts to address the soaring rates of scams, which accounted for [\\$1 trillion](#) in losses globally last year and now [surpass](#) the drug trade as an illicit industry. Last month, Senator Hassan released a holiday shopping scams alert, which members of the public can read [here](#).

Below are some practical ways to spot and protect against common holiday travel scams, including tips from the [FTC](#), [Better Business Bureau \(BBB\)](#), [Consumer Affairs](#), and [AARP](#).

Tips to Avoid Common Holiday Travel Scams

Watch out for travel impersonation scams and fake customer service schemes.

Always use official websites or apps instead of clicking on links or using contact information from sponsored search results, online ads, texts, or social media – as scammers will often try to impersonate major travel companies, including [airlines](#), [Amtrak](#), [hotels](#), and [rental platforms](#). Doing so can help you avoid these common travel impersonation scams:

- *Fake Flight Notifications:* [Fake flight cancellation text messages](#) are a common tactic by criminal fraudsters. These texts, which appear to come from major airlines, direct customers to a fake number or link to rebook their travel.

- *Unexpected Outreach:* Scammers look for travelers who post about flight delays or other travel problems, and then the scammers proactively reach out pretending to be a company's customer service representative to try to trick travelers.
- *Fake Customer Service Numbers:* Scammers are buying ads and sponsored search results with fake numbers for real companies, which can lead directly to scammers.

Take extra precautions when booking travel through third-party services.

Keep an eye out for signs of fake or predatory travel websites or ads. Offers that are intentionally vague or seem too good to be true are major red flags.

- Research unfamiliar travel companies on websites like the [BBB](#), where you can check customer reviews and complaints.
- Before making a purchase, look for signs that a [website](#) might be illegitimate, including misspellings, extra words, or unusual domains in the website's URL.
- When in doubt, [verify](#) a promotion with a hotel, airline, or reputable travel provider, and consider booking [directly](#) with these companies.
- Be suspicious of vendors that [don't provide specifics](#). For instance, if a company lacks a cancellation or refund policy, or offers "luxury" accommodations but does not name the hotel, it may be a sign of a scam.

Be especially careful when booking vacation rentals, as these listings are easy for scammers to fake.

[Reputable rental platforms](#) are the safest bet when booking a vacation rental.

- Double check that you are using the company's official website, as these sites can be spoofed.
- Even on trusted platforms, beware of renters asking for payment through an outside method like [wire transfers or cryptocurrency](#).
- Be skeptical of rental listings, read reviews, and research the property independently, if possible. Scammers will [list properties](#) that do not exist, are unavailable, or look very different from what is pictured.

Information for Victims

If you think you have been the victim of a scam, please visit [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](#) and/or contact local law enforcement.

Please also consider sharing how you or your loved ones have been impacted by scams by completing Senator Hassan's online scams [SURVEY](#). *This survey is informing Senator Hassan's ongoing investigation into scams and is not intended for individuals requesting assistance with fraudulent activity or seeking to file a report with law enforcement.*