

AG Schimel: Warns Wisconsinites about online travel scams

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MADISON, Wis. – With the holidays quickly approaching, Attorney General Brad Schimel today issued an advisory warning Wisconsinites about a possible travel scam involving fraudulent hotel bookings online.

“Keeping Wisconsinites safe online has been one of my top priorities over the last four years,” said Attorney General Schimel. “Being safe online isn’t just about children avoiding internet predators. Adults, too, need to be safe online and avoid potential scams and rip offs, especially around the holidays when many families will be traveling across the country to spend time with loved ones.”

Scammers create fraudulent websites and design them to imitate the hotel’s actual website, often using the hotel’s pictures and graphics. Consumers visit these fake websites and book a hotel room thinking they’ve booked their reservation directly through the hotel. Unfortunately, many victims don’t find out they’ve been scammed until it is too late – their money is gone and there’s little that can be done to recover lost funds.

Here are ways you can avoid being scammed when booking online, this holiday season:

- **Be cautious of redirection.** It’s easy to be accidentally redirected to another website without realizing it. If you click on an ad or link, you can be led to a fraudulent website – many that appear to be legitimate.
- **Be aware of the website’s URL or address.** Pay close attention to the web address, or URL, of the website you are visiting. Many fraudulent websites will include the hotel’s name in their URL to convince consumers they are on the hotel’s real website.

- **Pay the hotel directly, not with a third party payment method.** Be sure to submit your payment to the hotel with a credit card and not through a wire transfer or prepaid money card. Credit cards are a more secure method, and credit card companies provide better consumer protections. Also avoid websites that require payment through a third party and not directly through the website.
- **Be wary of “too good to be true” offers.** Fraudulent websites tend to offer incredibly low prices – that’s what makes them so attractive to consumers. If the offer seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- **Be skeptical of overly-glowing reviews.** If you notice a website has a substantial amount of positive reviews and little to no negative reviews, re-evaluate the site. Fraudulent websites are known to create their own reviews to convince consumers it’s real.
- **Pick up the phone.** If you’re skeptical of the website, find the phone number and call the company. If they’re fraudulent, they’ll be harder to reach than the real hotel, and they’ll be less likely to take your call. Once you have them on the phone, ask where the person is located. Once you’ve made your reservation, call the hotel to confirm – ask about the address, room amenities, and confirmation number. If the hotel cannot confirm your reservation and you prepaid, report it to your credit card company immediately.