

BBB: Scam Alert - When booking a rental car, watch out for phony deals

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Milwaukee, Wis. – A rental car shortage is [causing prices to skyrocket](#), and scammers have found a clever way to cash in. [BBB Scam Tracker](#) is receiving reports of con artists impersonating rental car company representatives. They claim to be able to get you a deal on your rental, but it's really a way to trick you into paying hundreds of dollars for a car that doesn't exist.

How the Scam Works

You search for a rental car company online and dial the phone number that appears at the top of the results. A “customer service representative” answers and explains that you are in luck! The company is offering a special promotion. If you pay for your rental upfront using a gift card or prepaid debit card, you can get a significant discount.

It seems odd, but the representative insists that the “deal” is a partnership with the gift or pre-paid debit card provider. You purchase the cards and share the PIN with the representative. In [several reports](#), the scammer insists that the money didn't transfer, and you need to purchase another card. But no matter how many cards you buy, the outcome will be the same. The “special offer” is a scam, and the rental car doesn't even exist.

“They said there was a special deal with American Express to get the rate (normally much higher), and informed me to purchase a gift card to get the discount,” One recent victim told [Scam Tracker](#). “Once I purchased the card and gave the code, they transferred the money.” The “representative” promised to deliver the car to the train station where the victim was waiting, but the car never arrived.

How to Avoid a Rental Car Con

- **Never make payments with prepaid debit cards or gift cards.** Scammers prefer these payment methods because there is nothing you can do to get your money back. Remember, legitimate companies almost always accept credit cards as the primary means of payment.
- **Use contact information listed directly on the business’s website,** instead of relying on an internet search for customer support phone numbers (double-check the URL).
- **Beware of sponsored links.** Fake websites sometimes pop up in your web browser’s sponsored ad section and appear at the top of the search results. Be careful when clicking! Hover over the URL to be sure it’s the right one.
- **When in doubt, verify special deals directly with the company.** If you are unsure about a promotional offer, get the customer service number from the company’s official website. Call the company directly to make sure the deal is real.