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Wisconsin BBB: Scam alert – airfare scams are cashing in on canceled flights

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Milwaukee, Wis. – Airline travel is back in full swing, but scammers are taking advantage of increased flight cancellations with a new con. BBB Scam Tracker has received multiple reports of scammers creating fake airline ticket booking sites or customer service numbers to charge travelers for rescheduling fake flights. **If you are buying airfare, use caution and double-check the URL or phone number before providing your credit card information.**

How the scam works

While doing an online search for cheap flights, you come across what seems like a great deal with a major airline. You book the flight—either through the website or by calling a customer support number.

But shortly after making the payment, you receive a call from the company saying there's been a sudden price increase or an extra charge to finalize your booking. This is something a legitimate company would never do! It turns out that you accidentally purchased tickets through a scam website or a phony customer service number. The price increase is a way to get more money out of you.

In another similar con, your original flight was real, but the cancellation notice is fake. You get an email or text message claiming that your upcoming flight has been canceled and you need to rebook. When you call the number provided, the "airline" offers to book you a new ticket – for a price. However, if you follow up with real airline support, you'll discover that nothing was wrong with your original flight. The

message was a scam, and you just gave your credit card details to a con artist.

One victim told BBB Scam Tracker: “I thought that I bought airline tickets with United Airlines through a company that sells at discounted prices. They called me shortly after I bought my tickets and said that the flight had been canceled. They wanted permission to put me on another flight with Southwest and said it would be 80 dollars extra… It turned out that United Airlines never canceled a flight. I tried to call this company and leave a message, and I tried to email them to no avail. It turns out that the airlines were unaware of this ticket purchase.”

How to avoid travel scams

- **Do your research.** If you come across a company you haven’t dealt with before, research it before making any purchases. Look on BBB.org for reviews and feedback from previous customers.
- **Double check flight details before calling support.** Scammers are blasting out fake airline cancellation emails and text messages that can easily be mistaken for the real deal. Confirm the information in the message – such as the flight and reservation numbers – is correct before calling customer support.
- **Confirm the URL before you enter personal and payment information.** It can be easy to click on a sponsored ad or impostor website without noticing. Before entering any sensitive information, double-check that you are on the right website and that the link is secure. (Secure links start with “HTTPS//” and include a lock icon on the purchase page. Learn more at BBB.org/BBBSecure.)
- **Be wary of third-party websites. Some websites appear to offer a legitimate service but are only fronts for a scam.** Be suspicious of websites with no working customer service number or physical address. Typos and grammatical errors can be indications of a scammer’s handiwork.
- **Make online purchases with your credit card.** Fraudulent charges on a credit card can usually be disputed, whereas that might not be the case with other payment methods. Unfortunately, there is no way to get back the personal information you may have shared.

For more information

For ways to protect yourself from travel scams, go to BBB.org/Travel. Read more about customer service number scams.

Stay one step ahead of scammers by subscribing to BBB's weekly Scam Alert emails.

If you've been a victim of an airline ticket or other travel scam, please report your experience at BBB.org/ScamTracker. By doing so, you can help others to avoid falling prey to scammers.

For more information or further inquiries, contact the Wisconsin BBB at www.bbb.org/wisconsin, 414-847-6000 or 1-800-273-1002. Consumers also can find more information about how to protect themselves from scams by following the Wisconsin BBB on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

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