

# Wisconsin Better Business Bureau: Top 5 vacation scams to watch for when making travel plans

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*Milwaukee, Wis.* – When planning your next trip, be wary of false promises and a sense of urgency that can fool you into paying for something that doesn't exist. Booking a vacation requires time and detailed planning. Whether you're just starting to book your hotel and flights or are already out of the office and enjoying your vacation, BBB encourages people to stay alert for common travel and vacation scams and use BBB Accredited Businesses to ensure their vacations go as planned.

**Here are the top five vacation scams and red flags to keep an eye out for.**

## **1. Vacation rental con:**

Vacation rentals are a great option if you want to have the comforts of home when you travel. When booking your rental, watch out for listings for properties that either [aren't for rent](#), don't exist, or are significantly different than pictured. These con artists lure in vacationers with the promise of low fees and great amenities.

The "owner" creates a false sense of urgency, such as telling potential clients that another vacationer is interested in the rental during the same time as your trip, to try and get your payment before you have time to do sufficient research or question the legitimacy of the listing.

### **Keep these tips in mind:**

1) **Talk with the owner by phone.** If you are not using a service that verifies properties and owners, do not negotiate a rental solely by email. Many scammers

don't live locally. Speaking with the owner on the phone and asking detailed questions about the property and local attractions will clarify if the listing is true. An owner with vague answers is a clear red flag.

2) **Check public records.** Investigate online by looking up the address and using Google Street View to confirm the property matches the one advertised. Verify distances to beaches, attractions, and airports while on the site.

3) **Use trusted vacation rentals.** Visit BBB.org to find [BBB Accredited vacation rentals near you](#). When doing your research on a vacation rental, search the company on BBB.org and read any customer reviews and complaints.

## 2. “Free” vacation scams:

When a cruise or travel company advertises a vacation as “free,” it does not necessarily mean the trip is entirely without cost or restrictions. Read the fine print and watch out for add-on fees for air transportation to the port, port charges, taxes, tips, and other undisclosed fees.

Learn more about [these cruise scams](#) and what red flags to watch out for.

If you're interested in booking a vacation or cruise package, **work with a [reputable travel agency](#).**

## 3. Third-party booking site scams:

If you book your airfare, hotel or other travel through a third-party website, be sure to use caution. [BBB Scam Tracker](#) continues to receive reports of scammers pretending to be [online airline ticket brokers](#). In the most common version of the scam, travelers pay with a credit card, and shortly after making the payment, they receive a call from the company asking them to verify their name, address, banking information or other personal details – something a legitimate company would never do. The company may also call and say your flight has been cancelled and you must pay additional fees to secure your seat or even bring baggage on board. [Learn more about these booking scams](#).

Do your research before booking airfare or a vacation package with a company you're not familiar with. Search on BBB.org and read customer reviews from other consumers.

## 4. Hotel scams:

When staying in a hotel, beware of [these techniques](#) used to get ahold of credit card information. Scammers count on tourists and business travelers being tired or in a hurry.

### Pay close attention and watch out for these tricks:

- 1) **Fake front desk calls.** Scammers call late at night or right after check-in, impersonating the front desk person. The caller claims there's a problem with the card on file and asks the traveler to "re-verify" the credit card information.
- 2) **"Free" wi-fi connections.** Wi-fi "skimming" targets travelers with the promise of free internet access. Scammers set up a fake connection that appears to be free hotel wi-fi, but it's not safe. They will control the connection through their computer and collect all the data the traveler transmits including passwords, card information, and more. Avoid doing any banking transactions or checking personal accounts when using an open wi-fi network. Use a secure, private network if it is absolutely necessary to access personal or financial accounts.
- 3) **Fake food delivery.** Scammers will distribute fake menus to hotel rooms. When a traveler calls the phone number and orders delivery, they collect the credit card information and never deliver the food.

## 5. Timeshare reselling cons:

Another common travel scam is the timeshare resale con. A timeshare owner who is looking to sell gets a call from someone claiming to be a real estate broker or agent. These scammers claim to specialize in timeshare resales and promise they have buyers ready to purchase. To secure this service, the scammer pressures the target into paying an upfront fee. The timeshare owner pays up, but the reselling agent never delivers. Read more about [timeshares](#).

### General tips to avoid vacation scams:

To plan your vacation with ease, BBB has tips to help you find reputable travel-related businesses and avoid the red flags for common travel scams.

- **Look for reviews and ask for references.** While vetting hotels, travel companies, vacation rentals and more, check [BBB.org](#) for reviews and complaints. To find trusted businesses, look for the BBB Seal. Look for photos

and read a variety of reviews. If the property or company doesn't have any online reviews or photos, ask them for references and call them.

- **Remember, a great deal might be too good to be true.** Scammers lure in targets by guaranteeing an amazing trip at a very low price. Research it first. If the hotel, travel or tour is much cheaper than similar options, be suspicious.
- **Book your travel online safely.** Take extra caution when using a third-party booking site. Make sure you are on a [secure, legitimate website](#) before booking your travel and making a payment. If you're unsure about the site, go directly to the hotel or airline's website and book directly with them.
- **Avoid wiring money or using a prepaid debit card to pay for your vacation.** These payments are the same as sending cash. Once the money is sent, there is no way to get it back. When paying with a credit card, the charges can be disputed.
- **Do some research.** Check the website for links to the company's social media accounts. If they do have social media accounts, check their activity and see if any other users have left reviews or voiced complaints. Also, look for typos and pixelated images. These mistakes are signs of a scammer, not a company that cares about its online presence.

For more information or further inquiries, contact the Wisconsin BBB at [www.bbb.org/wisconsin](http://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](#).

**ABOUT BBB:** The Better Business Bureau has empowered people to find businesses, brands, and charities they can trust for more than 110 years. In 2024, people turned to BBB.org more than 220 million times for BBB Business Profiles on 5.5 million businesses, and 725,000 times for BBB charity reports on 12,000 local and national charities. The International Association of Better Business Bureaus is the umbrella organization for the local, independent BBBs in the United States and Canada.