

# How to Avoid Holiday Travel Scams

## Podcast Transcript

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The holiday travel season is almost here. You're probably thinking of what gifts to get or what travel plans to make. With all of this on your mind, you may be less focused and let your guard down. Scammers know that people can be distracted during the holidays and often increase their efforts to target people at this time of year. Before you start making travel plans, it's a good idea to know some of the tell-tale signs of a travel scam.

Generally, if you receive an unsolicited email, telephone call or mail for a discounted holiday travel package or airfare that sound too good to be true, it's probably a scam. If you are offered a travel deal by email, it's very likely a scam as many of the bulk email travel deals or free vacations are. If you receive the deal by phone, be very skeptical. Ask the telemarketer for the company's name, address and local telephone number. If they refuse to provide this information, it's likely not a legitimate offer. If they do provide this information, you can check the track record of the company and call them back if they are a reputable company and you're interested in the deal.

Another form of misrepresentation scammers use is in the "fine print." If you're considering a travel offer, read the details of the deal. In some travel scams, one part of your vacation package, like the airfare, can be free or very cheap, but you're then required to stay at a specific hotel that turns out to be very expensive. When looking over the fine print of the deal, make sure that "fine print" exists and that it is clear. Any reputable travel company should have a phone number, physical address, and terms and conditions on their website, usually on the contact page. These terms and conditions should provide you with information like refund or cancellation policies. Scammers are less likely to post these policies, or they'll provide them in a suspicious manner, like only through a faxed request or only if you provide information. Any time you're required to provide your personal information to receive information on a deal, there's a good chance that it's a scam.

One way scammers try to slide the fine print by you is to put pressure on you to make a decision quickly. Any time someone says they need your commitment to buy immediately or that the offer won't be available much longer, this should send up a red flag. Putting this kind of pressure on you to decide quickly doesn't give you much time to research the company and they know it. If it's such a great deal, why should they pressure you to decide without knowing the facts?

Another scam to be wary of when planning your holiday travel is the call or email telling you that you won a contest. Public contests have rules and regulations, usually requiring that you enter to win. If you never entered a contest, you didn't win. If you didn't enter and you receive a call saying that you won, it's probably a scam. But if you're not sure whether you entered the contest, ask the agent for more details on the contest. A reputable contest will provide more information. Another version of this scam is to tell you that you won the vacation package, but that the caller needs your credit card number to verify and settle the arrangements. You should never have to pay for a prize.

So what can you do to make sure you're not the victim of a travel scam? Well first, for service members, a good and safe option is MWR and the information, ticket and tours office on your installation. They can tell you about different vacation options as well as military discounts. You can find the contact

information of the nearest ITT office through MilitaryINSTALLATIONS at [www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil](http://www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil). If you're not near an installation or don't have access to the ITT office, make sure you make your travel plans through a well-known travel company.

And if you think you've been ripped off by one of these travel scams, you should file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at [www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov](http://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov). You can also turn to Military OneSource for help. This no-cost 24-hour service is available to all active-duty, National Guard and reserve members (regardless of activation status), and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. Call 800-342-9647 or go to [www.MilitaryOneSource.mil](http://www.MilitaryOneSource.mil) to learn more.

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