

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer & Business Education

Travel Tips: How to Gear Up for a Great Trip

Whether you're off to see the sights, sunbathe on the sand, or ski the slopes, it pays to be an informed travel shopper. To help you avoid vacation frustration, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, offers these tips.

- **Buy your vacation package from a business you have confidence in.** Ask family and friends to recommend a company with a good track record. Think twice if you can't get a person on the phone to answer your questions. Contact the state Attorney General, consumer protection agency and Better Business Bureau where you live and where the company is based to see if there is a history of complaints on file.
- **Be on the alert for the telltale signs of a travel scam.** Unsolicited mail, email and faxes for deeply discounted travel packages may promise the world, but the fraudsters behind these offers will leave you at the gate.
- **Verify and clarify.** Call to verify your reservations and arrangements. Get the details behind vague promises that you'll be staying at a "five-star" resort or sailing on a "luxury" cruise ship. When you have the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the airlines, car rental companies, and hotels you'll be using, confirm all arrangements for yourself.
- **Get the details of your vacation in writing.** Get a copy of the company's cancellation and refund policies, and ask "What if...?" Consider whether some form of travel cancellation insurance may be appropriate. Make sure the product you're being sold is a licensed insurance policy. The U.S. Travel Insurance Association maintains a list of licensed travel insurance companies.
- **Use a credit card to make your purchase.** If you don't get what you paid for, you may be able to dispute the charges with your credit card company. However, don't give your account number to any business until you've verified that it is reputable.
- **Avoid a travel club flub.** Ask questions before joining a travel club. Sometimes, a "free trial" membership can result in unauthorized charges on your credit card. Find out what you'll get for your money and how you can cancel.
- **Won a "free" vacation?** Not so fast. Scam artists may tell you you've won a "free" vacation, but then claim to need your credit card number for "verification." Tell 'em to take a hike. If the promotion is legit, you never need to pay for a prize.

The FTC works to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. Watch a video, *How to File a Complaint*, at ftc.gov/video to learn more. The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.