



Your Monthly Money

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Airfare Scams Grounding Lockdown-Weary Travelers

Don't let these airfare scams ruin the vacation you've had to put off for a year

Now that millions of Americans are fully vaccinated, many people are eager to book vacations long delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. After all, who isn't ready for pandemic stress to melt away while gazing at the sea or taking in the sights of a different city?

Unfortunately, scammers see an opportunity too, with "con artists creating fake airline ticket booking sites or customer service numbers," according to the Better Business Bureau (BBB). No matter how much you want to get out of town, snapping up the first cheap airline ticket you find from an unfamiliar source during an online search could lead to fraudulent credit card charges, unexpected price increases, and other unwelcome surprises.

1. Ticket broker imposters

If you book your airfare through a third-party website instead of directly with the airline, use caution, warns the BBB. While there are many legitimate third-party travel companies, fake airline ticket brokers are out there too, waiting to take your money under false pretenses.

"These sites will cancel your airline ticket reservations, but not before charging you. In the most common version of the scam, you pay with your credit card like normal," says the BBB." But shortly after making the payment, you receive a

call from the company asking you to verify your name, address, banking information or other personal details – something a legitimate company would never do.”

If you’re considering buying an airline ticket from an unfamiliar company, do your research first, before providing your credit card information. Look up reviews and the company’s rating on the BBB website. Do an online search under the company’s name, watching for reviews from other customers or scam alerts.

2. Phony websites

That social media ad for cheap airfare to Cancun, Mexico, may look like a fantastic deal, but clicking on that ad could take you to a fake website that’s just a front for a scam, warns the BBB. Websites that raise red flags include those with no working customer service phone number, no physical address. Another tipoff: Typos and grammatical errors.

3. Non-secure URLs

When you purchase an airline ticket directly from the airline or a legitimate travel company, you’ll pay through a secure link (URL) that starts with “https://” and displays a lock icon on the purchase page. If the airline ticket broker or travel company insists you buy tickets on a page with no secure URL, don’t do it. Instead, purchase your ticket from the airline directly or a company or website that is familiar and provides a secure URL for payment.

4. Useless confirmation messages

If you purchase an airline ticket from a scammer, you may receive a “confirmation” email from the company with all the details of your flight – but no ticket attached to the bogus confirmation. When you call the airline directly, you find out the flight was not booked, and maybe was not even available in the first place.

5. Surprise price increases

One airline ticket scam results in getting hit up for additional charges after making your purchase. The company may call you after you book your flight, demanding additional money to finalize the booking. Then when you call the airline the flight is supposedly booked on, you find out the flight was never booked at all – but the scammer charged your credit card anyway.

“Fraudulent charges made 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,” says the BBB.