

What You Should Know before Renting a Vacation Property

As the temperature rises, school has ended and parents take a break from work, many families are making summer vacation plans. If you're thinking about renting a vacation property this season, do your homework first. Sometimes properties are not as they are advertised or could be a scam.

Research and compare rentals online. Beware of ads posted on Craigslist and other online classifieds, as these websites are popular with scam artists. Scammers may use fake photos and names, often stolen from other websites. They entice consumers with attractive offers hoping that they won't research the transaction further.

Be careful if renting from an individual. It is safer to use a reputable rental company or a real estate agent.

Check out the property owner. Get references from family or friends. Check with the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation, Attorney General's Office, and Better Business Bureau to see if there is a history of complaints on file.

Get the address of the vacation rental and use an online map (e.g. Google or Yahoo) to bring up the address. If you can't find it online, it probably doesn't exist.

Verify the condition and location of the rental property. Look at photos and take a virtual tour online. If possible, visit the property beforehand. Look for cleanliness and be sure that everything works as it should (i.e. toilet flushes, lights turn on, no leaks, etc.).

Get everything in writing. Always have a signed agreement, no matter how brief your stay. Make sure all verbal agreements are included in the rental contract including details about deposits, rules on pets, refunds, and what is included in the cost of the rental such as utilities, internet, etc.

Do not pay or put money down until you have carefully read and signed the rental agreement.

Never pay via money wire (e.g. Western Union). This is a sure sign of a scam. If at all possible, pay with a credit card, which provides some consumer protection if there is a dispute.

For more information about vacation rental properties, click on vacation and travel scams and avoid vacation rental horrors.

