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Attorney General

CONSUMER ALERT

Rhode Island Office of the Attorney General

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AG Kilmartin Reminds Consumers: Be Cautious When Making Summer Travel Plans

Summer vacation is right around the corner and people are on the lookout for last-minute vacation rental deals. Appropriately nicknamed the “Ocean State,” Rhode Island has over 400 miles of scenic beaches and the market for local seaside rentals is booming. However, Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin is warning consumers to watch out for potential scams relating to summer rentals and vacations.

“Rhode Islanders are making plans for the summer, but so are scam artists,” said Attorney General Kilmartin. “In the excitement of booking a summer getaway, sometimes people forget to read the fine print, and there are scammers who will try to take advantage of them. While you’re looking for great travel accommodations, there may be scammers looking for you. We are warning Rhode Islanders: be cautious when planning summer vacations.”

The Office of Attorney General offers the following tips to help consumers avoid being scammed when making vacation plans this summer:

- Use reputable travel agents and travel websites to purchase your vacation.
- If communication is initiated via the Internet, get a phone number to contact the broker/landlord directly.
- Verify and clarify. Get the details of the transaction in writing, preferably in the form of a contract, including property information, dates of your stay, total price, and exactly what is or is not included. Double check the arrangements yourself and make sure that everything is confirmed for the dates and times you had planned on.

- Ask for references from past renters.
- Check with the Better Business Bureau for complaints against the travel agent, travel website or rental company before you make any reservations.
- If possible, pay with a credit card. Credit cards offer more options for recourse should the travel company attempt to defraud you or your accommodations are not what was promised.
- Be very wary of wiring money, making international payments, or sending a money order or cashier's check.
- Never give out personal information (bank account number, social security number, etc.).
- Be careful when renting properties far away. It's easier to get scammed if you can't verify the condition and location of properties pictured online.
- Be extremely cautious of nearly-free, all-inclusive vacation packages. Often the amenities and perks advertised are not as they appear – there may be additional hidden charges, or buyers may be forced to sit through lengthy high pressure sales presentations.
- Always read the fine print before purchasing. Before you buy, get a copy of the company's cancellation and refund policies, and ask "what if...?" Legitimate businesses will always provide a written contract guaranteeing your reservation.
- Consider buying travel cancellation insurance in case something comes up.

"The bottom line is that you need to do your homework before you book a summer vacation," said Attorney General Kilmartin. "I have said this before, but it can't be overstated: if a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

If you believe you are a victim of consumer fraud, please contact the Consumer Protection Unit at the Department of Rhode Island Attorney General at (401) 274-4400. You can download a consumer complaint by visiting our website at www.riag.ri.gov. You can also email us at contactus@riag.ri.gov.

About the Office of the Attorney General Consumer Protection Unit

The Office of the Attorney General Consumer Protection Unit investigates and mediates consumer complaints concerning unfair and unlawful business practices and misleading advertising arising out of alleged violations of the Deceptive Trade Practices Act. If groups of people are victimized by a deceptive trade practice, this office may file in the Superior Court a civil investigative demand, which is a formal investigation. In appropriate cases, a lawsuit to stop the illegal business practice may be initiated.

Apart from carrying out its statutory responsibilities, the Unit also provides information and referral services to the general public. Consumers are directed to the appropriate governmental or private agencies for help in answering specialized questions or resolving disputes that are not within the Unit's jurisdiction.

The Consumer Protection Unit is available to speak to community groups on how to prevent being a victim of identity theft and other scams.

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