
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

OLYMPIC VISITORS WARNED ABOUT PROPERTY RENTAL SCAMS

VICTORIA – As British Columbia prepares to welcome the world to the 2010 Winter Games, the B.C. Government, Better Business Bureau and Consumer Protection BC are reminding both International visitors and Canadian residents to be careful and do their homework before booking vacation rentals.

Online classified advertisements have made it easier for people to find things like home rentals. However, the listings are not regulated or vetted, and prone to scams. People seeking accommodations should be wary if:

- The supplier requires a substantial deposit before handing over the keys or even showing the home. Don't pay any money before inspecting the home, inside and out. If you cannot travel early enough to inspect the property, ask for a contract outlining all terms, details and conditions.
- The supplier asks the renter to wire money through wire transfer services such as Western Union or MoneyGram. Money sent via wire transfer service is extremely difficult to retrieve. Once the scammers have picked it up; there is little recourse – if any – for getting the money back.
- The supplier is located elsewhere and prefers to communicate via email. For example, a scammer might say they have just been relocated out of the country. Don't believe them.
- The deal sounds too good to be true. Scammers will often list a rental for a very low price to lure victims. Find out how comparable listings are priced. If the rental comes in suspiciously low, walk away.

Another tip for consumers is to pay with a credit card if possible, as credit card purchases often offer the protection of a 'chargeback'. Consumers may be able to cancel or reverse a credit card transaction and its associated interest charges in cases where there is evidence that the goods and services purchased were not provided to the consumer.

For consumers looking to book accommodations:

There is an official website with a variety of resources at www.2010destinationplanner.com. The website lists hotels, bed and breakfasts, private home rentals, and rooms on cruise ships.

When booking accommodation through a third-party provider, potential renters should check to see if the B.C. travel agent or wholesaler is licensed with Consumer Protection BC at www.consumerprotectionbc.ca.

If a consumer has suffered a loss and did book through a licensed B.C. travel agent or wholesaler, they can contact Consumer Protection BC at 1-888 564-9963 or info@consumerprotectionbc.ca.

For travel and accommodation disputes:

- If consumers purchased travel services through a licensed B.C. travel agent or wholesaler and did not receive the travel services they paid for, they can contact their insurance or credit card provider. If they are unsuccessful, they may be eligible for reimbursement from B.C.'s Travel Assurance Fund for consumers. See www.consumerprotectionbc.ca for information about the fund.
- Tourism BC has an information and reservation service that also deals with any disputes involving Tourism BC-Approved Accommodation. See www.hellobc.com.
tel: 1-888 222-8402 and fax: 1-800 563-5306
Customer complaints may be over the phone, fax or mail. However, Tourism BC does not pursue complaints regarding refund issues.
- For any other potential complaints against a company, consumers can file a dispute with the Better Business Bureau at www.mbc.bbb.org.
- If you believe that you are a victim of fraud, please contact the Canadian Anti-Fraud Call Centre ('PhoneBusters') at phonebusters.com or 1-800 495 8501.

On April 1, 2009, to better protect consumers, government clarified the wording in regulations to confirm who must be licensed in the short-term vacation rental industry. Vacation rental companies who rent accommodations on behalf of a third party (like a home or condo owner) need to be licensed. As well, the Travel Assurance Fund that licensed companies pay into is used to reimburse consumers if they do not get the contracted travel services they pay for when they book accommodations through licensed B.C. vacation rental companies.

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