

Biden urges consumers to be wary of vacation-related scams

Wilmington – As the summer travel season kicks into high gear, Attorney General Beau Biden warned Delawareans to be on the lookout for travel-related frauds and scams.

“Vacationers are prime targets for scammers who attempt to swindle victims out of their money or steal their personal information to commit identity theft,” said Biden. “Help protect yourself from fraud during your travels and secure your property and valuables back home while you’re away by taking a few simple precautionary measures.”

Families can help protect themselves from fraud while planning a vacation and during their travels, and guard against theft back home by being aware of the following scams reported to law enforcement across the country:

- **Travel ticket scam.** Online ads, emails, and other marketing schemes advertise cheap or free airline tickets on a nonexistent airline whose name sounds remarkably similar to a well-established commercial airline. In order to claim or purchase the tickets, the victim is directed to provide the “airline” with personal information that the scammer uses to commit identity theft.
- **Rental Scam.** Vacation rental properties are advertised, commonly online, by conmen who do not actually own the properties. After a renter pays the scammer a deposit or surrenders personal information to them, they later learn that the rental property either does not exist or that the property is not owned by the scammer, who hijacked details and photos of the property for their

fraudulent advertisement.

- **Pizza delivery scam.** Flyers for phony pizza delivery are slipped under hotel doors or handed out at travel locations such as the beach. These advertisements direct travelers to place a delivery order by providing their credit card number, which the fraudster uses to commit theft.
- **Imposter Scam.** Scammers contact a hotel's front desk and ask to be transferred to a random guest room. The scammer poses as a hotel staffer when the unsuspecting guest answers the phone, claiming that the hotel has encountered a payment problem and directing the guest to provide credit card number or personal information in order to resolve the issue.
- **Social Media posts.** Thieves monitor social media accounts looking for postings that state when consumers will be away on travel, leaving their home empty and a target for burglary.
- **The vacation arrest scam.** An elderly resident receives a call or e-mail from an imposter claiming to be their grandchild on a trip out of state or in a foreign county. The scammer may report they have been arrested or mugged and pressure the resident to wire them money immediately in order to post bail or travel home.

Follow these tips to avoid being victimized in a vacation-related scam:

- Use only reputable travel sites and companies for booking rentals and other travel services. Thoroughly verify rental postings made on Craigslist or other social networking sites. Never provide personal information over the phone or via e-mail, and never wire money to an individual or company or send money to a PO Box without first verifying their authenticity.
- Don't announce your vacation on social media until after you have returned from your travels.

- Securely lock all doors and windows of your home while traveling, use timers to keep lights on at night, and ask neighbors to keep an eye on your property while you are away.
- If you are traveling far from home or for extended periods of time, notify your bank in advance about your trip to help guard against suspicious behavior on your account.
- Limit what you carry in your wallet (credit cards and other documents with personal identifying information) during your travels.
- If you receive a call from your hotel front desk seeking payment information, address the matter face-to-face with hotel staff.
- Be wary if you receive an urgent call from a family member claiming to be out in trouble on vacation and needing money fast. Verify the claim with another family member and ask the caller to provide information about them or about you that only a family member would know.
- Be cautious of your belongings and personal information when traveling, no matter how close the destination is.

For more information on how to avoid summertime vacation scams, visit the Biden's Consumer Protection Unit online at www.attorneygeneral.delaware.gov/fraud, call the Consumer Hotline at 1-800-220-5424, or e-mail consumer.protection@delaware.gov.

Compiled, in part, with information from:

- <http://blog.aarp.org/2014/05/28/the-return-of-summer-travel-scams/> (AARP)
- <http://www.bbb.org/greater-maryland/news-events/consumer-tips/2014/05/vacation-scams-to-avoid/> (Better Business Bureau)

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