

## [ACCC warns of big blow-out in travel-related scams](#)

Australia's consumer watchdog, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has received over 100 travel-related scam complaints so far this year, with more than AUD 250,000 reported lost.

ACCC Deputy Chair Delia Rickard revealed the extent of travel scamming yesterday as the ACCC alerted travellers to beware of holiday scams when looking to score a cheap deal on their winter getaways.

### **The scams can be avoided by booking through a travel agent.**

Rickard warned consumers: "While you are making holiday plans, scammers are plotting to steal your hard-earned dollars with fake rental listings, fraudulent holiday vouchers and by hacking into travel websites."

Over a quarter million dollars had been lost on such schemes, she added.

Scammers set up fake online listings for rental properties to try and lure unsuspecting consumers into parting with their money, the ACCC warned. With these scams, consumers pay for their accommodation but the property either does not exist or, if it is real, the owner knows nothing about their booking.

Just a couple of weeks ago, a story surfaced about a massive scam along those lines, perpetrated by criminals against hapless consumers making their own travel bookings. **Fairfax media broke a story about scammed Australian holidaymakers pursuing a class action lawsuit against one of Britain's (and the world's) largest banks – Barclays.**

**Rather than book through a travel agent, the story related, many prospective tourists over the past 18 months have booked holiday stays directly online.** They have then gone on to wire millions of dollars into accounts with London-based Barclays Bank. The consumers thought the money was going to pay for holiday stays booked through popular holiday rental websites.

However, it seems that criminals have used "phishing" scams to hack into websites, assume the identity of holiday property owners and then steer customers to placing money directly into a bank account run by the same criminals.

**It actually gets worse, as many consumers are unaware that apart from not getting what they want they can place themselves, as some already have, in serious situations to be denied Airline boarding, missing connections with no communication links to rectify, given wrong cruise cabin or hotel room numbers after arrival – when it is far too late – or trying to fight against international laws to claim a small loss of monies that the scammers already know would be not fought as the cost of international lawyers and government department legal fees will far outweigh the cost of any compensation- if that was forthcoming anyway!**

The ACCC reiterated yesterday that scammers are hacking into popular holiday rental or travel websites to access email inquiries sent by consumers. The scammer assumes the identity of the property owner and steers customers into making bogus bookings.

"Our most commonly reported travel scam comes from holidaymakers finding that discount accommodation vouchers they paid for don't arrive, are fakes or simply can't be used as promised," Rickard said.

She said one consumer, who the ACCC called Claire, had received an email offering vouchers for a heavily discounted luxury resort in Bali. Claire had been making inquiries on travel websites for a deal but this offer of 10 nights in a five star Kuta resort for AUD 1200 was by far the cheapest. She paid for the voucher via international funds transfer and booked her flights. When Claire arrived in Kuta, the hotel had no knowledge of the voucher or her payment. Claire had been scammed.

Rickard advised consumers to follow some simple steps "to ensure that your dream holiday doesn't turn into a nightmare".

- "Don't trust the legitimacy of an ad just because it appears in a reputable newspaper or online classifieds website as scammers often use these. If you receive an email out of the blue from a stranger offering a great holiday deal, delete it and do not click on any links or open attachments." "Always keep your computer security up to date with anti-virus and anti-spyware software and a good firewall. If you think you have provided your financial details or sent money to a scammer, contact your financial institution"

Book through a licensed Australian Travel Agent, especially if they have been in business a long time and have accreditations and a quality setup of making contact with and referring bookings via.