

Explosion of fake hotel booking sites worries lawmakers

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Florida lawmakers have requested the US Federal Trade Commission launch an immediate investigation into fraudulent online hotel booking sites. **The same scams are cropping up around the world and have caught Australians in the web.**

Research suggests three out of five Americans use travel websites to book their travel.

Heidi Dennis, general manager of the Atlantic Hotel and Spa on Fort Lauderdale Beach told WPLG Channel 10, an ABC-affiliated television station in Miami, that bogus websites were being put up and taken down so quickly “the consumer has no idea that they have been scammed until they show up at the hotel.

“A lady came to the front desk, she had a confirmation, it looked like ours but we didn’t have her name in our system,” Dennis said.

Further investigation revealed a bogus site offering a super low price.

The American Hotel and Lodging Association says misleading booking websites have duped 2.5 million hotel guests into making reservations through them.

More than two dozen members of US Congress are demanding that the Federal Trade Commission investigate companies tricking consumers with deceptive and fraudulent booking websites.

Similar scam sites have caught Australian consumers.

The Weekend Australian recently reported that a Melbourne IT specialist lost AUD 9000 over the fake listing of a Hawaiian villa.

The seven-bedroom Honolulu villa was apparently listed as available to rent for AUD 1200 a night, with potential customers advised to contact “Emma”.

The alleged sting outlined by the Australian involved someone responding to an inquiry by emailing an interactive replica of Airbnb’s booking pages, which led to a website which turned out to be false.

In another case, the paper said former AFL star Leigh Colbert had paid AUD 8000 earlier this year to stay in a Monaco villa, only to find he had paid a hacker who did not own the property.

Verification of websites is becoming more complex and harder to confirm as some are now adopting telephone numbers online that are diverted to a phone unit that answers if they are that hotel itself or hotel chain.

Travel Agents tend to use their own closed contact links and assume legal responsibility anyway for travel bookings (not only hotels) so be warned.

Websites can be created, impressive and look amazing but can also be pulled off of the web within seconds.