

We're Looking Out For You



Pinellas County Consumer Protection
www.pinellascounty.org/consumer
(727) 464-6200



Travel Smart Tips

As the holidays approach, many people are making travel plans. Before you book your trip, here are some smart travel tips.

- ❑ **Get recommendations:** Ask your friends and family which companies they used for their trip and how was their experience. Checkout online reviews to find out how other people rated the service and prices of airlines, hotels, restaurants, rental car companies and more.
- ❑ **Checkout the company:** In Florida, non-exempt sellers of travel must register with Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) each year. Visit www.freshfromflorida.com to find out if the seller of travel is registered with FDACS and if any complaints have been filed against them.
- ❑ **Read the fine print:** A signature on a contract indicates acknowledgement and acceptance of the terms and conditions. Once you sign, you may not have a right to cancel. Be sure to read the entire contract thoroughly, ask questions, and do not sign it if there are any doubts.
- ❑ **Pay by credit card:** It gives you more protection than paying by cash or check. If you don't get what you paid for, you may be able to dispute the charges with your credit card company.
- ❑ **Be cautious of fraudulent travel offers:** Be skeptical of unsolicited mailings, emails or telephone calls claiming you've won a "free" trip. Often this is a ploy to obtain personal and/or financial information. You're told you're responsible for the taxes/fees, or you may be persuaded into purchasing additional products or services.
- ❑ **Know the cancellation and refund policies:** Emergencies happen and you may have to cancel your trip. Ask what the cancelation polices are for each part of your trip (hotel, rental car, airline, cruise, etc.). If you aren't able to cancel for a refund, you may want to consider whether travel insurance is worth purchasing.

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- **Ask about resort fees:** When you book a hotel online, you expect the rate you see is the rate you'll pay. But, many hotels will add a "resort fee," for services such as the fitness center or internet access, to your nightly rate. Often, these fees are mandatory whether you use the services or not. When comparing rates be sure it's the total price. If you're not sure, call the hotel directly to ask about any additional fees.
- **Consider using travel apps:** Travel apps can help you search for best airfares and hotel rates, alert you to last minute deals, manage your itinerary and notify you of delays or cancelations.
- **Don't let a scam ruin your vacation:** Nothing will ruin your vacation faster than getting scammed out of money. Travel scams take all forms, from a caller claiming to be a hotel employee and requesting you verify you credit card information; to bogus restaurant menus slipped under hotel room doors. To protect yourself, go to the front desk with any questions or to requests. Be sure to keep your money and travel documents in a secure place at all times.
- **Ready, Set, Go:** The day before the big trip, call to confirm everything is set and you are ready to go. Save time and even money, by pre-booking your seat printing your boarding pass and make sure your suitcase cases don't exceed the weight limit.

For more information or to file to a complaint, contact Pinellas County Consumer Protection at (727) 464-6200 or visit www.pinellascounty.org/consumer/tips.htm.