



10 tips to avoid online travel scams

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In almost 10 years of business, Ian Ford's online business of selling tickets to Disney World and other attractions has never had as many calls from customers as it is getting now. More people than ever are calling him directly to check out the validity of his website -- as they search for travel deals on the internet.



Not only is the recession driving more people to search online for deals -- including those who didn't need to save money by buying discounted Disney World tickets -- but more newcomers to [Undercover Tourist](#) are calling to ask about the trustworthiness of the site, Ford said in a telephone interview from his home in Austin, Texas, where he splits his time from his office in Florida.

For customers who ask how safe their money is with Undercover Tourist, Ford said he tells his employees to give the common sense response of having the customer talk to their friends and family and research his company before trusting it with their money.

"Don't rush into ordering from us if you don't have time," he said. "Take your time. Most scams have time-sensitive ordering requirements."

Here are 10 tips on how to avoid online scams from Undercover Tourist:

1. Check if the vendor is an authorized dealer. Look for an authorized seller seal. Undercover Tourist has contracts with Disney and other companies in Central Florida to sell their tickets, Ford said.
2. Research online. Do you find any feedback on the site, such as in [online forums](#), blogs or groups?
3. Check contact information. If there's a telephone number, is the phone answered quickly by friendly staff who are helpful about the product? Is a physical address listed? Can you contact the company via e-mail, and if so, are your questions answered promptly?
4. Press coverage. Is the Web site mentioned in magazines, newspapers on TV or guidebooks?
5. What is the refund policy?
6. Hidden fees -- are there any?
7. Shipping costs and speed. Are they clear and how long does delivery take?
8. Web site design. Professional and organized? Easy to use?

9. Security certificate and VeriSign logo or equivalent. Are the checkout pages secured with a padlock visible in the browser?
10. Too good to be true. If the offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is, or there's a catch.

Research by calling the site or [asking everyone](#) you know about it is the best advice, Ford said.

"Go to the [online community](#). That's the best way to take care of it," he said.

He also recommends paying by credit card to make getting a refund easier if you're scammed.

And if you've lost money and want to try to get it back, or just want to ensure that other people aren't scammed, Ford recommends filing a complaint at [econsumer.gov](#), the [FBI](#) or the attorney general of your state.

Popular travel scams include paying to become a travel agent, and getting a "free" trip by joining a travel club, he said. The travel club often starts with a promise of a free trip for a \$100 administrative fee, Ford said, but then the travel dates you want aren't available but become available for another fee. More and more costs are added to seal the deal, which never arrives.

Like your parents probably told you a few times, if it looks too good to be true, it probably is.

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