

10 TIPS TO AVOID RENTAL PROPERTY SCAMS

1. Speak directly to the owner and or rental agent on the phone. Don't rely on email, as email is anonymous. Be especially cautious when "Free" email services are used.
2. Ask detailed questions about the property and surrounding area/attractions, the property owner should know the area very well. Ask for proof of ownership and look at public records to verify owner. Obtain any phone numbers for property associations, condo management offices or home owners associations. Call to see if the owner name matches the property.
3. Locate the vacation rental property on a Google Map or other online mapping source. If there is a problem locating the property on the mapping system, it most likely does not exist. You can also use Google Maps to measure driving times to your desired destinations, and to verify the details of the property listing (like whether or not it really is on the ocean).
4. Make sure the property is listed on a trustworthy rental agency website.
5. Avoid paying upfront fees via wire transfer.
6. Contact a local rental agency in the area, even if the property is not rented by them they can verify information as well, including price range. Remember scammers will post the property below the average rental rate to attract the most amount of interest.
7. Look for common rental scam signs, emails with bad grammar or strange sounding English, request for money to be wired and vague answers to your questions.
8. Report any fraudulent listings to the website directly (Craigslist, Online Rental Websites etc..) Remember it is easy to cut and paste pictures of property from legitimate websites and most scammers have a legitimate looking contract that they email you.
9. Avoid giving out any personal information including social security numbers, bank account information and credit card numbers.
10. Most of all if it sounds too good to be true, most likely it is.

An online tool is available at <http://www.rentvine.com/tools/rentalscamquiz/> to help tenants avoid rental scams.

Source: Rehoboth Beach Police Department, 5/2011
www.rehobothpolice.org